DRAMATIC VALUES

C. E. MONTAGUE

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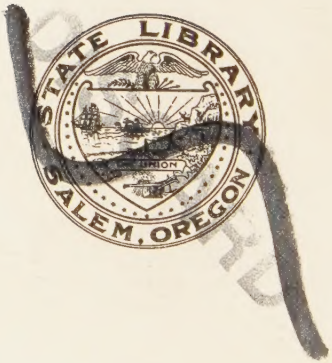

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DRAMATIC VALUES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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DRAMATIC VALUES

BY

C. E. MONTAGUE

SECOND EDITION

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TO

ALLAN MONKHOUSE

PREFATORY NOTE

ONE of these papers was read to the Manchester Playgoers' Club, and afterwards printed in the "English Review." The rest, or the stuff they are made of, appeared in the "Manchester Guardian." I thank the owners for leave to reprint them. Each is formed by grouping into one loose whole several first-night notices of plays that led to kindred thoughts, or gave or withheld a similar quality of pleasure. They are, I confess, exhumed with misgiving.

> "For wherefore try,
> To things by mortal course that live,
> A shadowy durability
> For which they were not meant, to give?"

He would be a bold reprinter of his own journalism who did not forestall his reviewers by asking himself the dread question. And yet for old theatre notices there may be a kind of excuse. You wrote them in haste, it is true, with few books

about you, or moments to look a thing up; hot air and dust of the playhouse were still in your lungs; you were sure to say things that would seem sorry gush or rant if you saw them again in the morning. How bad it all was for measure, containment and balance! But that heat of the playhouse is not wholly harmful. Like sherris-sack in the system of Falstaff, it hath a twofold operation; "it ascends me into the brain . . . makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery and delectable shapes." At least it sometimes gives you that illusion: below yourself in certain ways, you hope you are above yourself in others. Some of the shapes, you may fear, looking back, were mere recollections—some of mine from Lamb, from Pater, from Sarcey, from Mr. Henry James, from Mr. William Archer, from Mr. Arthur Symons, from Mr. Walkley, from Mr. Yeats, from my friends Professor Elton and Professor Herford and Mr. A. N. Monkhouse. I have to ask pardon of these and any others, people of critical substance, whose gear a rude cateran of a pen may have lifted at midnight.

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DRAMATIC VALUES

The Plays of J. M. Synge

TRAGEDY, in its effect, is a state of an audience's mind, a painless sense of the pressure of somebody's pain; a sense, too, that quickens your wits; you are given a new range of sight, such as griefs of your own sometimes bring, but no shock, like grief's, to numb you past using it. Stirred in that way, you can understand anything; hints go all lengths with you. On this the dramatists count. When a tragic play comes to its height they will make speech abruptly elliptic—what might, to a mind coming cold to it, seem almost crazily callous, bathetic, irrelevant; but, if the right heat be on you, richly expressive and, to yourself, flattering—flattering as drawings are where a few dots and odd ends of line, charged and flashing with glints of a meaning, trust you to fill in nine-tenths for yourself; expressive in making the heat of emotion consume, as it seems, its own vehicle. Speech itself, you feel, is being burnt

away, like old letters in a grate, till all you have of it is some queer shred or two, quivering in a flame —Macbeth's "She should have died hereafter," or Giovanni's line "I did not know the dead could have such hair."

This, as a rule, is a feat for fifth acts. Everyone is your old friend by that time. You have been led, all the evening, up a staircase of ascending modes of sensibility. But Synge in "Riders to the Sea" takes you straight into black tragedy; you step through one door into darkness. The play in a few moments thrills whole theatres to the kind of hush that comes when Othello approaches the sleeping Desdemona. Synge, from the first, is as terse, as exacting, as strange as he likes; yet everyone sees what he means, and all of his people have always the tragic importance. You look at them as, we are told, other prisoners look at the one who is there to be hanged. "I can't tell why it is," says Maeterlinck's old man as he looks at the family, still unconscious, to whom he is now to bring word of the death of a daughter, "that everything they are doing seems to me so strange and important." In life, say, a child is run over; a woman comes running out, hatless, from some little street, to be given the body; you see it is hers, and at once she is momentous, poignant; how it all matters, all that she does, all

that she wears! Synge has the touch that works in you that change of optics in a minute; and not at a climax only, or in some picked passages; you tingle with it from the start, as you do in "Macbeth," and you cannot tell why, except that virtue goes out of the artist and into you.

One of Synge's means to this end is a rhythm unlike any other yet used. No doubt it is so far like what Lady Gregory uses and what Mr. Yeats sometimes uses that all three are things of the mouth, and the Irish mouth; all use the common notation of syllables stressed and unstressed, without metre, to fix some audible qualities of Irish country speech. But Synge, within these limits, found or shaped a rhythm of his own so far beyond the commoner music of this speech that it is said he had to teach it to some of his Irish actors, and it was only then that they saw in the mournful drift and loose linking of his harmonies a new language behind language, subtly rich in emotional import, like the melodies of the prose letters that people write in Shakspere, Antonio's to Bassanio perhaps the loveliest. This rhythm, no doubt, or the rhythm it came of, was caught from the voices of fishers in Aran, shaken by fear or bereavement. But there is, pretty surely, much in it of Synge's own bringing. The tones of a

person who tells you a story say not only what some one did and how someone else looked when he did it, but how it all struck the narrator. So you have, in the rising and falling of old Maurya's voice in the play, not only the way some old woman in Connaught lamented a lost son, with Synge and his notebook near by, but also how Synge viewed the world, as a whole, in which people are given such lives.

All this without any prancing about on the tragic high horse; rather, at each turn, some effect of understatement, almost of miscarriage—effects that tragic life commonly has when you see it lived, though it seldom has them in books, where fear or pain commonly speaks with the tongue of a poet who has a great hit to make; loss is a cue to him; down falls the blow and out comes a punctual cry of the heart, round and full and meet for the case, whereas the real thing seems like the ideal thing somehow gone wrong and missing its high notes, yet charged, through this very bathos, with fresh and rending tragic values of its own. These are the values that Synge feels and gives where the drowned man's sister asks: "Isn't it a pitiful thing when there's nothing left of a man who was a great rower and fisher but a bit of an old shirt and a plain stocking?" and, again, when the mother whose six sons are dead, says: "It's a

great rest I'll have now, and it's time surely;" and "I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening."

In some ways the best English spoken is spoken in rural Ireland now; the Wicklow peasant's toothsome, idiomatic use of short words is nearer to the English tongue's clean youth than anything you hear in England—even in Northamptonshire—to-day; and in Synge's plays the English of Elizabeth comes back to us from Ireland as fresh as the Elizabethan settlers left it there. Moment by moment as you hear his "Shadow of the Glen," your ear is caught by some such turn of speech as modern English gives you mere smudged copies of: "Hearing the wind crying and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay"; "he'd run from this to the city of Dublin and never catch for breath"; "I've heard tell it's the like of that talk you do hear from men, and they after being a great while on the back hills"; "it's lonesome roads she'll be going, and hiding herself away till the end will come and they find her stretched like a dead sheep, with the frost on her, or the big spiders maybe, and they putting their webs on her, in the butt of a ditch." It is like hearing Justice Silence on the price of ewes:

"Thereafter as they be." It tastes to the ear as a nut piques the teeth. Think of a quite good modern English play, and the way it is written. "To my imperfect intelligence it seems that the first essential is to be capable of resigning oneself to a scheme of things which ordains that some women shall spend their lives in perpetual fag, while others—our more fortunate sisters, as they are styled—enjoy freedom and luxury galore"; "the credulous parson, the sanguine widow, the struggling professional man are his chief victims, although his transactions are occasionally spiced by a soiled flimsy from an adventurous *demi-mondaine*." Perhaps that is how many people in England do talk. If so, what much better English is spoken in Wicklow! How much purer, stronger, more vivid, less dilute, less tangled, less turbid with the loans of slang and semi-science from languages that they do not know!

In this English of the English Bible Synge presents a way of receiving life, ideas of what is worth having and doing, as far from those of Englishmen as those of Russians or Japanese. In the "Shadow of the Glen" the harsh crab-apple tang of peasant cruelty has its own difference from the same taste extracted from other earth; it is remote from that of Jude the Obscure's first wife, or that of Scott's Callum Beg, or that of the rustics

who cut the spy's throat in Zola's "Débâcle"; it tastes of its own soil, like each country's red wine.

In Synge's comedies the Authorized Version vocabulary serves an Irish popular gift and passion for a special quality of highly figured speech:

"If the mitred bishops seen you that time, they'd be the like of the holy prophets I'm thinking, do be straining the bars of Paradise to lay eyes on the Lady Helen of Troy, and she abroad, pacing back and forward, with a nosegay in her golden shawl."

No English peasant talks thus; it is the Irish idiom in thought, the fancy feeding on its own expression and working itself up by coloured and vehement speech to some far-fetched, clinching climax of circumstantialness, as in this ardent picture of the disagreeables of hanging:

"Ah, that should be a fearful end, young fellow, and it worst of all for a man destroyed his da, for the like of him would get small mercies, and when it's dead he is they'd put him in a narrow grave, with cheap sacking wrapping him round, and pour down quicklime on his head, the way you'd see a woman pouring any frish-frash from a cup."

Such dialogue gives English people a glimpse of a strange place where English is not much worn or

faded, nor phrases so much used at third hand as by their own tongue-weary townsmen with their pitiful little stocks of verbal tag and rag and outfaced patter from the music-halls. Imagine the poor Cockney substitute for Christy Mahon's vivacious vignette of his old nurse: "And she a hag this day with a tongue on her has the crows and seabirds scattered, the way they wouldn't cast a shadow on her garden with the dread of her curse." Or think of the London shrews done to the life by Mr. George Robey, and then of Synge's Mayo virago: "Don't the world know you reared a black ram at your own breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew?" In all countries persons who know what is what, and have read wisely, revel in apt and picturesque diction; most of them come at the feast by the bookman's route; Synge's people come by the child's; they seem to be exploring, make experiments with similes, warm up and go on, rollickingly outdoing their own ventures, in a fever of inventive glee, as if the use of speech were a wonderful continent newly landed upon.

Synge had studied the mechanics of drama in good schools, and when he went to work for

himself his genius was not hampered by technical unhandiness. "Riders to the Sea" is built as tight and spare as a barrel; no loose ends of verbiage stick out; not a touch in it but is organic; almost every speech earns its position thrice over—explains something past, expresses somebody's character, and helps the action on. To achieve lucidity in a short one-act tragedy is like carving the Commandments on a threepenny-bit; by Synge the little material aids to clearness are picked and used with the demonic acuteness of French experts at the game. The white boards which point half a dozen passages, the "young priest" who is only heard of, the forgotten cake by which the action is carried lightly past what might have been an awkward stop—all is done as by a proficient. There is no amateurish drifting of characters on and off the stage in fortuitous-looking floes; when they come in or go out they could, to your sense, do nothing else. For description, there are passages that give you optical illusions, like that of the water dripping to the dry ground from the drowned man's clothes. For drawing of character there are passages like that of the neighbour's murmur at the want of coffin-nails, and the daughter's girding at her mother's sorrow—passages so drastic in veracity that any but the surest artist would have shirked them, fearing a discord, or spoilt them by

knocking off 50 per cent of their force in the telling. Synge works them easily into their place, managing their discords into elements in a larger harmony.

As almost every English tragic actor acts Hamlet in the end, so almost every modern Irish dramatist writes a "Deirdre." Mr. Yeats, Mr. Trench, "A. E.," and Synge are but an abridged list of those who are through with it. Till an Irish poet has slain his Deirdre he is like a brave who has not yet killed his man; he cannot be easy. Much of it is Lady Gregory's doing. Her "Gods and Fighting Men," and "Cuchulain of Muirthemne" have done at last for the old Irish romances of the Red Branch what Malory did so much sooner for the Round Table; the new Irish poets dig in her excellent prose for the stories of Deirdre and Aengus, Cuchulain and Conchubar, just as our Tennysons rummage Malory for Lancelots, Galahads, and Guineveres. As nearly as may be, the Deirdre romance has the place in Irish legendry that is held in other literatures by that of Lancelot, that of Francesca da Rimini, and that of Iseult. Like these, it heads a whole kind; it has a like clash of generous passions; it, like them, shows you treasons transfigured by a nobility in the traitors, and softened by a tragic helpless-

ness before fate;" and it has the same generalness of appeal — poets and students and popular audiences take to them all.

In Synge's unfinished play of "Deirdre of the Sorrows"—unfinished, but quite actable—he lays the story out in three acts, almost exactly as "A. E." had done, giving a first act to Naisi's arrival at the place of Deirdre's captivity and to their flight together, a second to the place of their exile and happiness, and a third to their return and death—Naisi killed by the jealous King's men, and Deirdre stabbed by herself at Naisi's grave. Except this general structure, everything in Synge's play is wholly original. It is written in a prose sometimes like that of his own first plays, sometimes like that into which he translated Petrarch and old Frenchmen—not that the two were ever far apart, for both are close to speech, and as musical, austere, and melancholy as natural sounds like the crying of curlews or the whistle of blown grasses—a rhythmic plaintiveness which in this last play has more changes of melody than it ever had, thinning to a whine for the crazed spy Owen ("It's a poor thing to be so lonesome you'd squeeze kisses on a cur dog's nose"), or swelling to a noble stateliness for Deirdre's dying descant on her own fate in life and in story. There is a difference, too, from the temper that made "The Playboy"

and the "Shadow of the Glen" just what they are. In everything that Synge did there was a touch of harshness, in the good sense, an astringency like the spare suggestion of green that there is in a perfect light blue glaze on a vase, a minute admixture of something stingingly sane and hard, not sourness, but just an antiseptic against sugariness and the "sweetly pretty." In some of the things he wrote in the twelve months during which he knew he was dying, the harshness was overforced. He wrote then like a sentenced man, with an invalid's craving for life at its rudest, for full-blooded curses, for drunken men fighting at fairs, for all the things that drovers and poachers value so moderately and sick men of letters so highly. You think of the cough-ridden Stevenson's hankering for wettings and carnage, of Henley the cripple, his oaths and defiances. Health, some security about the first good things of life, seems to be almost needed for people to take much joy in its further refinements, its distillations of graded qualities of sensation: the burly, red Morris was just the man to value Burne-Jones; and your Scotts, perhaps, must be lame, and your Byrons club-footed, before virilistic romance can wholly possess them. Synge, when in the hands of the doctor, would look anywhere away from one of "A. E.'s" delicate imaginative pictures.

"Adieu, sweet Angus, Maeve and Fand,
Ye plumed, yet skinny Shee,
That poets played with, hand in hand,
To learn their ecstasy.

"We'll stretch in Red Dan Sally's ditch
And drink in Tubber fair,
Or poach with Red Dan Philly's bitch
The badger and the hare."

But it seems as if, after this malady of the temperament was spent, the moribund Synge, like the dying Don Quixote, had ridden at last into a kind sunshine and tranquil waters. In his "Deirdre" he not merely won back his balance; he perfected it, and was able, while keeping as fiercely clear of sentimentalism as ever, to achieve a tenderness and radiancy of beauty that he had not before reached. The ecstasy of the two lovers over their life together in exile, "waking with the smell of June in the tops of the grasses," has a loveliness and exaltation quite unembittered, and so has the whole expression of their mood of surrender to the general consignment of lovers to dust. Other characters have things to say that have just the old savage vividness, like the remark made by Owen of the living heroine of a previous romance, that "now she'd scare a raven from a carcase on the hills," and the subsequent remark of someone else about Owen that "he was spying

on Naisi and now the worms are spying on his own inside," and the observation that where these passionate hearts had been, there would presently be only "sheep waking and coughing in the night when there's a great wind blowing from the north." All that was Synge, from first to last, is expressed in this play—the sure ear, the instinct for idiom, the brooding joy in hard, strong lines of character, the disdain for artistic compromise, the energy of tragic imagination, and also a new serenity of beauty.

No such gift has been made to modern Ireland by any of her children as Synge's disengagement of the essence, the differentiating virtue of the native imagination in Irish country folk. Such services help to make nations, for they render national qualities apprehensible and sensuous, so that the idea of them can be grasped and cherished by plain minds. Commonly it is tough work to keep a modern country from kicking away any quite great work of art that is laid at her feet. Shelleys, Ibsens, Whistlers—their own receive them not, and when Ireland's turn came she did as the rest, or part of her did. But soon the hooting is over. Already from Galway to Prague Synge's eager and glowing genius has entered at open minds. To

them the august and quiet sadness of "Riders to the Sea" has made the word "tragedy" mean something yet more stirring and cleansing to the spirit than it did. In his harsh, sane, earthen humour, biting as carbolic acid to slight minds, they find a disinfectant well worth having, at the lowest, in an ailing theatre.

Fiscal Measures

AS we will not subsidize the theatre, the theatre must subsidize itself; a manager must have his fiscal measures, his plays that call up the world to be taxed for the good of the cause. The cause may be Ibsen or Maeterlinck, Shaw or Brieux, Shakspere, Sudermann, Yeats; let it rest on a concrete foundation of "Trilby" and "Garrick," "The Only Way" and "Mice and Men," "Monsieur Beaucaire," "The Third Floor Back," and "The O'Flynn." Some of the loveliest modern vases have for their economic base a good business in unbewitching tiles for public-house façades. "It's blokes like me," the pot-boiler may say to the masterpiece, as the convict said to the warder, "that keeps blokes like you." Then gently scan plays which come from a manager of brains, and yet seem to you null; they may seem so to him; perhaps it is only his method of making us all endow art, with which these, at first sight, have so little to do; they may have been made to go up and down

England putting a duty on her devotion to middling craftsmanship, in aid of a craftsmanship better. Besides, "we ken na what's resisted." Think how much more money the dealer, who seems to stoop now, could often have made by marketing trash even trashier.

"No scandal about Queen Elizabeth, I hope," was the just remark that greeted Puff's announcement of yet another drama of the spacious days. Messrs. Kester and Major, writers of "Dorothy o' the Hall," are so far distinguished, at least—they answer this hope; they do not set out to add to the terrific past assigned to the great Eliza by the aggregate labours of modern dramatists. True, their Elizabeth does begin to purr and to fan herself complacently on hearing, incorrectly, that the hero of the play has praised her looks, and she drops involuntarily into a slight *pas de fascination* on learning that he thought well of her dancing. But these temperate reflections on the maiden Queen's demeanour are not of the substance of the piece; they come in just to mitigate for us weaker brethren the severity, such as it is, of its historical studies. With the same benign intention there are satisfied the two sorest needs of a modern audience

when trying to live back into Elizabeth's reign—(1) a Raleigh's cloak "act," as they say at the music-halls, and (2) some reference to, or quotation from, Shakspere; and this in spite of some difficulties, Raleigh being a boy at the time ascribed to the play, and Shakspere a child of four, almost as young as the learned Leipsius, who, as we find in "Tristram Shandy," composed a work on the day he was born.

By gentle means and easy tasks Messrs. Kester and Major, like those that teach babes, seek to make us at home in a distant age. Tudor English is given us with some abatements; we have not to take the sheer plunge. First comes a sterling archaism, then a relieving flash of modernity. "Beshrew me," says the super-Elizabethan Lady Vernon, a dragonsome dowager congenially dressed in acrid greens and blues, or "Out on thee, baggage!" or "How, girl!" "Oh, Lor!" ejaculates the heroine, and we breathe again. "The centuries kiss and commingle."* Dorothy Vernon proposes to exchange clothes with Mary, Queen of Scots: "I, by your leave," she says, in the metre Shakspere used, "will wear your robes awhile." "I suppose," she subjoins, with the fine prose humour of to-day, "I must wear something." Tags of Tudor idiom and tags of modern slang

* From "Unity put Quarterly," by "Q."

live like brothers on the lips of half the characters. They

> "Mix with the must that is Massic
> The beer that is Bass."*

Nor is the study of Tudor manners, in the first families, fatiguingly drastic. The Duke of Rutland sends a jester, a professional, with his legs of different colours, to the reigning Vernon, of Haddon, to ask Vernon's daughter for his son. Vernon, so Roman a father is he, proposes to have his daughter flogged on the terrace by the local butcher, for disobedience. Dorothy, after three days' bread and water, has a moving dialogue with the jester about various foods, culminating in a cry of the heart for sausages. Going on from strength to strength, she grabs the longed-for sausages, one by one, from the table, while feigning preoccupation with her cares, stuffs them into her mouth, and throws a table full of tarts, venison pasties, etc., about the room and through the window. Is History, Thackeray asked, when meditating "Esmond," never to take off her peruke? She had it off with a vengeance, and with it some of her own hair, in this affair of the sausages.

The whole play is what people call a thoroughly clean, healthy drama, rich in sound, manly senti-

* From "Unity put Quarterly," by "Q."

ments, like the Derbyshire Capulet's grand burst of family pride at sight of his daughter ravening like a Genius of Famine, "We Vernons were always devils for our food"; we move always in "stately homes of England"; the badinage ranges among such lawful topics as the corpulence of one's father's guests; and our faith in the superior efficiency of honest, childlike simpleness of heart, as a general policy, receives a salutary reinforcement from the prodigies of gumption done by the innocent Dorothy whenever the children of this world have to be beaten at their own reprehensible games. In writing to each other, Stevenson and Henley gave the name of "tushery" to those creations of fancy in which the characters say, "Tush!" "Beshrew me!" "This shall be answered!" and (after a conditional clause and with a menacing air) "He dies!" Who shall purvey tushery for the million more shrewdly than Messrs. Kester and Major, though there may be a superficial air of foolishness about some of their touches, or tushes?

Mr. Jerome K. Jerome writes a play of an angel that troubled a pool (time, the present), and how certain bad cases stepped in, or were in at the time, and were healed. This is miracle; and

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miracle tends, in the telling, towards the technique of early stained glass—a stiff or naïve composition, a practice of islanding off special virtues or vices, each incarnate in somebody. Every one tends to be like some separate bit of the glass, stained through and through with one colour only, and kept to itself by its frontier of lead. So it is with "The Passing of the Third Floor Back." The plot is naive: eleven bad cases, each one in his turn, come up for the cure, and find it the same, and go away whole; and not one of the team is a blended, multi-coloured being like the rest of us; each is one vice on two legs, a mere absorbent for one dye. A cheat, a slut, a shrew, a Pict—as Steele would say—a cad, a hussy, a rogue, a satyr, a coward, a bully, a snob—each on his own strict line they move, and the angel on his, and if the psychologists do not like it they are not helped to lump it. Mr. Jerome will give them no discount.

So far he is quite medieval. But then the subtle modern in him comes me cranking in. How, thinks your modern, shall any man or angel cast out devils but by science, the chief, etc.? Vices, no doubt, are bacterial, and some germs, they say, may be countered by priming the system with the corpses of their kindred. Your slaughtered bacilli become antitoxins. So each ailing soul shall be dosed with the thought that its own special vice is

the vice, of all others, most dead in it. The shrew shall be told what an angel she is, the sneak what a Bayard, the slut what a Martha of seemly service; into each you inject the right antitoxin. Was it not thus that the female exorcist in "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" relieved each demoniac she met? How else did the modern scientific saint in Gorky's "Lower Depths" restore an almost Gadarene assortment of patients? We may not find it quite quintessential Christianity, nor yet quite quintessential moral science; still, we do get, shall we say, Christian science, and audiences love it.

It feels like brawling in church, or, at least, yawning there without putting a hand to one's mouth, to confess that at times we were bored by the play—not by its humour, for all Mr. Jerome's is good, but by the moral allocutions of the angelic visitant. When once his therapeutics were on foot, when he began to tackle the unregenerate one by one, singling each beneficiary in turn out of the herd by the mere power of his eye, while the yet unsaved remainder hovered uneasily in the background, "up stage," doing letters or accounts, or trifling with the newspaper, and bringing back to us memories of a sheep-wash with the first of the flock already in the present throes of baptism and the rest as yet huddling and shuddering

apprehensively in the pen upstream, we first reflected mournfully that there would be eleven of them, and then thought what a wise man Shelley was to say that art ought not to go about doing good by direct moral precept, but should content itself with invigorating people's imaginations, and trust the invigorated imagination to do the moral good afterwards. However, to confess so much is to incur the whips and scorns of many learned divines and able publicists and of great audiences. They find the "Third Floor Back" a pleasure to sit under.

The day after Feydeau's and Desvallières' "Champignol Malgré Lui" was first played at Paris in 1892, Sarcey, who knew his public, said that it would be "one of the greatest successes of contemporary farce." So it has been, and is. It is France's "Charley's Aunt," the most popular comic thing, of the most rudimentary kind, that the modern French theatre has produced. And yet it is not quite a "Charley's Aunt," at any rate when M. Galipaux plays in it. For "Charley's Aunt" seems like the knockabout farce of people to whom true comedy is so much sawdust, whereas "Champignol Malgré Lui" is the knockabout farce of people who might enjoy and practice

comedy some other day, but are fooling just now. It is like Wordsworthian man; "not in utter nakedness" does it come; shreds of authentic comic vesture cling about it here and there—St. Florimond's speeches at the portrait-painting, for instance, and the conversation of the genuine and the spurious Champignol on guard. But the mass and body of it is—well, not rubbish fit to be banned, for the humour of horseplay has just as much right to crawl on the earth as its fellow-creature, comedy, but almost as primitive as the interspersed buffooneries with which the Middle Ages used to ease the emotional strain of plays on the Nativity and the Passion.

Much of the fooling, when done by M. Galipaux, is droll beyond description: a man who would not laugh at his St. Florimond drawing the Captain's portrait and then retreating before the sitter—the now risen sitter- with "the slack of his trousies crawlin'," as Mulvaney says, "wid invidjious apprehension," might be certified as agelast or laughter-proof. But there are dry parts. All through the first act the authors are merely playing for position, in the billiard-player's sense: they are only laying the complex foundations of the big edifice of amusing confusion that is to follow in Acts II. and III. All this playing for position is most clever; let those who doubt it try to explain

as many separate things, through dialogue, in as few words. And yet, one half wonders, was it worth while? When Shakspere wrote this sort of stuff, all hullabaloo and mistakes of identity, in "The Comedy of Errors," and when Plautus did it in the "Menæchmi," they just cut all the playing for position. They put the balls where they liked. They sent someone on to the stage at once to say, in effect: "Now, if you please, you are to assume, without further exertion on my part, that circumstances have caused a certain brace of persons to come into a certain place at the same time as a certain other brace of persons so like the first brace that they are sure to be mistaken for them." And then, without more ado, the Dromios and Antipholuses go at it, hammer and tongs, fists and toes. Nowadays we have to have—or are supposed to have to have—all these circumstances produced in court and proved credible, and the ceremony occupies the first acts of countless farces. It is seldom highly diverting, and the strain which it imposes on the intellect does not assist digestion in the same high degree as the average second act.

M. Malin's "Médor," acted in English as "Fido," is two points better than "Champignol

Malgré Lui." For one thing, it is the working out of a single, and a happy, comic idea—the vivid recollection that will sometimes arise, in later life, of the quelling, sky-darkening ascendancy of some titanic bully of your boyhood, and the nightmare apprehension that perhaps he may turn up yet and proceed to resume the old relations with you. One can imagine Napoleon the night after Austerlitz, or Wellington after Waterloo, dreaming that some bullet-headed cock of his old private school, some Cambyses of the dormitory, has come to life again, given Napoleon's or Wellington's wrist a good twist, and explained, convincingly, that uppish small boys had better know their places. This is what happens in daylight to the James Entwistle of "Fido." Some years after his marriage he meets his old school despot, Charles Marshall, now a large, mannish, unmanly beast, of the kind that second-rate French novelists call, with rapturous emphasis, *un mâle*. Marshall proceeds to invite himself to dinner, and finally to camp in Entwistle's house, employ Entwistle as his fag, and make love to Entwistle's wife. And now comes in the other good point of the farce—the tang of grotesque tragedy which there is in many of the best farces and which helps to make "George Dandin" one of the best in the world. Entwistle gradually grasps his own case, lays a trap

to catch his wife and Marshall, bends himself up to assert his rights and floor the tyrant, and then, when the great moment comes, he funks. It is the thrill of George Dandin collapsing when bluffed by the effrontery of Angélique, the thrill of Scott's Conachar jumping into the Tay like a scared frog to get away from the fighting. Entwistle, like Conachar, has "drunk of the milk of the white doe," and since, as Colonel Newcome observed to Sir Thomas de Boots, "a poor devil can no more give himself courage than he can make himself six feet high," his predicament has its tragic touch, although, he being one of Nature's grotesques, it is farcical too.

"The stage is more beholding," Bacon says, "to love than the life of man." For "love" you might read "artful valets." Plots of plays in all ages have rested on the craft and subtlety of valets. There was an artful valet in "The Frogs" of Aristophanes; Terence's Phormio was an artful valet; there is a very artful valet in the "Aulularia" of Plautus. In half the plays of Molière there are valets, nearly all artful; one is the hero of "Les Fourberies de Scapin"; another plays Providence to the young people in "L'Avare"; two others diddle the heroines of "Les Précieuses

Ridicules": a fifth runs "L'Étourdi" all by himself. Generation after generation of artful individual valets were born, flourished, and died, till there grew up a typical or universal conception of the artful valet; there was evolved the central idea of the artful valet, the artful valet "in himself," and since that time he has nearly always conformed to type. He is the registered chauffeur of comic heroes not up to driving themselves; he knows all the standard ways of going into the ditch, and even the ingredients of devotion to his own interests and his master's have fixed proportions in his composition.

Spinks, the hero of Mr. James Mortimer's farce of "My Artful Valet," is a study, a not very studious study, in this tradition. He falls within the subdivision of artful valets who change clothes with their masters, the subdivision headed in antiquity by Xanthias in "The Frogs," and in the Tudor age by Tranio in "The Taming of the Shrew." Sardou and others have said there are only seven, eight, or some other moderate number of primordial dramatic situations in the world. One of them must be the situation where master and valet change clothes.

You may be shocked at first to find this Spinks wearing a livery. For in standard fiction livery is the badge of other tribes; whence a certain bitterness in

them, bitterness as of the footman Tommy in "The Newcomes" on hearing of that "supersellious beast," the Marquis's valet, who "will no more speak to a man, except he's out-a-livery, than he would to a chimbly-swip." But profounder thought will turn your regret to admiration. Spinks is to change clothes with FitzJocelyn, his employer; therefore, visibility of effect being of the essence of drama, this change has to be striking, antithetical, a change that proclaims itself a change at the first glance. So exit the minor truth of the life of man and enter the higher verities of drama. Sarcey used to grow eloquent on the propriety of making a Queen, travelling in a desert, appear in robes of ermine, gold and purple. A dust-cloak might, no doubt, attain a trivial, local, fugitive veracity, but what mattered visible testimony to her being in the Sahara, compared with visible testimony to her being a Queen?

Yet there may be limits even to the duty of falsification for the stage. Need a stage Russian, like Mr. Mortimer's Count Evitoff, and nearly all his stage fathers before him, look round before every exit he makes and say, "Droll people, these English!" or rise from the sofa and bow deeply to the ambient air whenever he mentions "His imperial *majesty* the Tsar, my august masterre?" "I' ever see such maids in all your life?" Lord

Castlewood would ask when wine had overcome his sense of the impolicy of impugning the looks of his wife's servants. J' ever see such loyalists in all your life? Or would the first-class fact of human vanity be unduly eclipsed if the heroine's ugly father, eyeing his pretty daughter, omitted to say that "she's as like her father as two peas?" This Chadwick is a provincial father, nay, *the* provincial father, the man with rough-hewn trousers of a pattern like a cultivated hill-side seen from an opposite hill, the man with all the parcels, the man who will not have a cab, the François of Labiche's "Petits Oiseaux," the Gregory of "A Pair of Spectacles." One feels a sneaking suspicion that only a part of the distance from truth at which Gregories and Chadwicks are conceived is really necessary, and the rest thrown in to save labour. For of course it is laborious to hunt up a noteworthy provincial father in nature first, and then to observe him as he is, and then to reconceive him in terms of the theatre; much easier to take your provincial fathers ready-made, ready stage-made, and then remove them just the least bit farther from dull truth. Thus does untruth extend her frontiers, Russian loyal ritual advances, and the checks worn by stage captains of industry grow and grow and nowhere may abide.

Though Mr. H. A. Jones's play of "Dolly Reforming Herself" be not very good as a whole, it still has one good scene, and if Judas himself is let out for a night every Christmas to cruise on an iceberg, because he once gave to a beggar, what shall not playgoers forgive to a play that has one rousing moment? The rousing moment is that of a cyclonic tiff between Dolly Telfer and her husband over Dolly's bills for dress. The theme, of course, is aged. Sir Peter Teazle and his wife fought over it, and in the works of Molière there is still visible the pit from which Sheridan, following his prudent custom, digged. But that matters little. Homer himself as Mr. Kipling has ascertained, "'ad 'eard men sing by land and sea. And what 'e thought 'e might require 'e went and took." In art you may carry off and devour anything you can digest; that is the only test—does it turn to new tissue inside you? And Mr. Jones's quarrel stands the test. It is longer than Sheridan's or Molière's, but it never flags; and, like a true squall, it has variety, the winds of wrath frequently changing their direction and velocity, and the rain also (supplied by Dolly in short scrawms, as the Irish say, of strategic weeping) doing its office with much fidelity to nature. The pair talk, too, as people do talk in rages, abruptly, slangily, without thought

how each sentence shall end; in fact they talk good English, unlike Mr. Jones's people in their hours of ease, when they say: "You're putting a much worse construction on this than the necessities of the case demand," and, "Isn't it an instance of that obscure operation of the feminine mind whereby the merest wish becomes an accomplished fact?" as if they were second-rate books.

Herr Meyer-Förster's play "Alt-Heidelberg" is like the fruitful vine that all the archers shot at. It pays like "East Lynne," and every critic says how poor it is. New days may come and plays may bloom with a newer, more engaging sentimentalism, but, so far, audiences are evidently happy in this three hours' revel of standard melancholy; we all relax our brains and lie and wallow in it, "as wallowing narwhals love the deep," and are not disturbed, at least not much disturbed, even when the Heidelberg undergraduates objectify their own youth and shout, "It is May; we are young; we are in Heidelberg!" as if one ever thought of youth in that way until it is over. The play is clad from head to foot in these little unveracities; and yet, at any rate when acted in German, it is no mere undiluted trash, nor even quite uniformly middling. It does at some happy

moments spring your sense of the goodness of youth. And there must be some talent, you feel, in a play of University life that is not wholly grotesque. Think of the Oxford of "Charley's Aunt" and of "Formosa"—if Drury Lane has not yet lived down "Formosa" in your memory; think of the cropper, the at any rate relative cropper, come by the epic author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays" when he tackled Oxford as a subject. Somehow the thing has never been done to any purpose; good stories and plays of childhood we know, and good plays and stories of manhood we know, but the interim seems to be almost dramatist-proof: some awkwardness, as of hobbledehoydom, afflicts it; it is like one of those regions of doldrums that perplex the mariner—here, do what he may, the playwright cannot raise the wind. Yet right across this notorious zone of immobility Herr Meyer-Förster contrives to propel his quaint craft. It is of no use, after that, to say she is wholly unseaworthy. To the critical eye she may be profusely perforated with leaks, but still she is the first that ever burst into that *mare clausum* and came out on the far side. And yet, yet, imagine an undergraduate saying: "Boys, it is May; we are young; we are in Heidelberg!" What possessed her not to sink?

Dust hath dimmed Trilby's eyes. There must

now be actual adults who, being then only some six or seven years old, did not notice the transit of Du Maurier's novel across the heavens of Mudie and W. H. Smith—how at first it made no great hit in England, then won a great vogue in America, and finally returned to England, this time to boom indescribably. Like Canning, it had brought in the New World to redress the balance of the Old. Makes of boots were named after it; allusions to it in music-hall patter were always taken in by the whole house; phrases from it were laid up in our national treasury of slang. Then some newer rage —"Dodo" perhaps, the now extinct, or was that earlier?—took its place, and "Trilby" settled down to line boxes and curl the locks of maidens. All that survived was a character-part for Sir Herbert Tree in a play that excited us all when it was first acted in 1895. The actor has grown much more popular since; the play is no worse than it was; and yet it does not quite touch as it did. There seems to be something peculiarly fugitive about the triumph of these orgies of uninspired melancholy about youth and youthful comradeship and baffled youthful love and the pace at which these things consign to ashes. Perhaps it is that every one is secretly craving for artistic expression of the universal and commonly dissembled emotion about them;

that its few perfect expressions, in lyrics like "Auld Lang Syne" and prose passages like the description of Sir Barnes Newcome's lecture, with Ethel on the platform, and Clive looking at her from the other end of the room, are not supply enough to meet the demand, and so we go up and down looking for the new masterpiece of pathos that should come, and crying, lo here! and lo there! as often as some new piece of sentiment seems not quite wishy-washy.

For a time we luxuriate in each fresh warm bath of delectable sadness, and then somehow it seems as if, like other warm baths, it had better be let run off. And woe unto those who refuse these acts of conformity to Nature. On a sunny afternoon last winter we saw Mrs. Kendal act Ohnet's "Ironmaster," now old, stiff and spavined, but for more than twenty years a serious rival to famine, pestilence, and the art of Miss Corelli as a precipitant of innocent tears. In France these tender floods have of late been stayed, partly through an abundance of gifted critical derision for the whole old gang of constructors of the "well-made piece," of which Ohnet's is a moderately shining example. But in England uncritical hearts continue to be wrung in fairly large numbers by this plaintive old tract on making the best of a bad connubial job; emotion was visible in this audience early in

the second act, audible at its close, and throughout the third we might be said to be living, more literally than Mrs. Gamp, "in a wale." Some of those who were not weeping in direct compliance with the author's intentions must have been almost as deeply affected by the combined incidence of (1) the contrast between the sunshine they had rashly abandoned in Oxford Street and the place of wailing and gnashing of teeth for which duty or perverted inclination had led them to exchange it; (2) the pangs of desire to see Mrs. Kendal act something else; and (3) the ardour and success of the orchestra in lacerating all bosoms, according to custom, with a lethal series of what an ignoramus in music can only assume to have been the dirges, coronachs, threnodies and dead marches of all ages and countries, diversified with an occasional waltz of an abysmal melancholy. Even the "Ironmaster," of course, could not kill Mrs. Kendal's acting; wherever Ohnet suffered her, even for an instant, to express an unstrained sentiment in language of this world, her art sprang up uncrushed and became its perfect self again. But would that some of the play's occasional music for the committal, apparently, of the dead could be played over it and not during it. As the American tourist observed, in declining to visit Pompeii, we ought to let bygones be bygones.

"Monsieur Beaucaire" is an engaging Georgian comedy, of one of the three kinds. For three there are. There is, first, the Georgian comedy written there and then by a Georgian man—for instance, "The Rivals." There is, secondly, the Georgian comedy written now by a man, or men, of genius, who try to come at the Georgian state of mind, so far as there was one—to find out what it was that people, or some people, thought more worth winning or doing then than it seems to us now. Such writers do for the Georgian period in drama what Thackeray did for it in fiction by "The Virginians," and what Mr. Austin Dobson does for it in lyric verse. For instance, Henley and Stevenson's "Beau Austin." And there is, lastly, the retrospectively Georgian comedy of externals, pretty or quaint, of minuets, of polite protestation, of pump-rooms, dishes of tea, and terrific liturgies of etiquette — for instance, 'Monsieur Beaucaire," written almost to-day.

Somebody ought to trace out the burgeoning of this outward Georgianism in modern Georgian plays. There was hardly any "local colour" in many Georgian plays written in the Georgian time. "The Rivals" is less Georgian, superficially, than "Beau Austin"; "Beau Austin," in turn, is less Georgian than "Monsieur Beaucaire." Like some other stage traditions, that of "old-world courtli-

ness and old-world bloom" seems to grow more exacting as it grows older. With drugs sometimes you can only repeat an effect by increasing the dose; perhaps, if you are not a genius unbound by such laws, you can only revive in playgoers a previous impression of Georgian old-worldliness by adding to your original stock of Georgian formality and precision in some things and extravagance in others. To attain each time the old effect of truth you have to slip away more and more from the truth itself. If an Irish peasant comes upon the English stage to-day dressed like an Irish peasant, and not in knee-breeches and a high hat with a a pipe in it, many playgoers say: "Oh, how untrue to nature!" And if a Georgian play were written now with no more Georgian tags and phrases than there are in "The Rivals," many playgoers would say, "How unlife-like! How destitute of the spirit of the age!" An audience is known to have hooted Shakspere's "Richard III." for a too mild version of the facts of that sovereign's character as made known to the public first by Shakspere himself and then, with added stress, by Colley Cibber. They shouted out: "Give us the real thing!"

Any plot, of any period, will go into a Georgian play of this third type; and the plot of "Monsieur Beaucaire"—the prince who masquerades as a

plebeian, wins a bride while doing it, and then goes back to his principality—is common to the fairy stories of all ages. You watch Mr. Lewis Waller ambling gallantly and joyously through this easy part—for him, good artist that he is, a condescension—and at every turn some phrase or gesture reminds you of one or other of the older refugees and masqueraders—of that other exiled Gaul, the Vicomte de Florac, punting in gambling-hells about Leicester Square; of Florizel and Prince Charming, who also won brides in disguise, or of Apollo in the house of Admetus. There used to be so many in older plays that Horace made it a rule that in exile and poverty they must not talk as they would in their kingdoms, principalities, and dukedoms. But nobody minds Horace; Florac toasted his bit of bacon with the air of a Spanish grandee; King Alfred in Royal Academy art looks unmistakably regal while he allows the cakes to burn, or is scolded therefor; Monsieur Beaucaire talks, walks, snubs and fences like a transparent fairy prince; the orchestra sees through him quickly; it plays him on to the stage.

There may be a touch of quality even in the harmless, necessary pot-boiler. "Monsieur Beaucaire" is just about as good in its way as the larger public in its hours of ease will stand. It is, no doubt, the mere complexion of a play, with no

heart or brain, scarcely a solid face even, behind it; the lady whose love goes up and down like mercury, according to her lover's reputed worldly station at the moment, is a trivial baggage, even for a costume piece: Beaucaire, with his "scores," his composure, and his Cyranoic swordsmanship, is a schoolboy's hero; the current appeal to our fellow-feeling for suffering dukes is not very lofty. But the two big flirtations are neatly and prettily done; the sentiment is not entirely mushy; some turns in the talk are amusing; and though Georgian Bath might marvel to see how super-Georgian it is made, still there *is* an atmosphere of some sort to snuff up, and many plays of greater pretension have no more atmosphere in them than the sole of a fly's foot.

Every manager of spirit seems to need a "Beaucaire" or two for his stand-by. They serve him as a waiting-room when no new play is to be had, or when some new play has just proved it were better had it not been had. His public will take first-rate pieces of work from him sometimes, but not all the time, and the rest of the time must be filled. Burbage, when his public felt that Jonson's learned sock had been on long enough, restored their tone with bull-baitings, jigs and

walking on the tight-rope, "Monsieur Beaucaire" being then unborn. Irving, when we fainted with excess of masterpieces, gave us "Faust" and "Ravenswood"; they were his Beaucaires, Dorothies, and Third Floors Back. Without one under you the life of brave experiment at the theatre is the high trapeze without a net. They are enterprise's policy of insurance, art's tax-gatherers, like Goldsmith's natural history, or the novels that Grant Allen wrote to live on while he wrote better ones.

Good Acting

COQUELIN'S acting was nothing but acting; unfortified by any separable thrill or lure of beauty, sex or intellectual ascendancy, his power was simply the sum of the three strict elements of great acting— a plastic physical medium, a finished technical cunning, and a passion of joy in the thought of the character acted.

For the first of these, Coquelin's face was the true comic mask; the voluminous, mobile chin; the long upper lip that at will would let down like a drop curtain or curl back over the teeth in every width of smile or grin from Tartuffe's to a yokel's; the tilted, sensitive nose—it seemed to flick like a terrier's; the eyes, surrounded, as those of some orators are, with concentric folds and radiating spokes of working muscle, every twitch a unit in a code of symbols waiting for the executant purpose to combine and recombine them into rich and curious significances; the voice, not sweet, but ringing, penetrating, supple, and, at need, mega-

phonic, or rushing and soaring up rocket-wise, as Mr. Henry James has described it, to the hushed dome of the theatre.

And then the execution. It was said he would eat his way slowly into a part in the first weeks he played it, working down to the character's soul through his own first tentative expression of it, just as some writers and painters can think and feel best through words and paint; they need the quickened apprehension that comes with the intellectual stir of a technical effort. In this exploratory stage he would slowly be perfecting, too, the external mould of the character, working it out, as if in wet clay, in the ductile, malleable flesh. Finished, the cast would dry; after twenty years' disuse it could be taken out and reassumed with not a lineament blurred. And yet, within the general limits of this mask, he had at commandment infinite changes of mien; in Tartuffe he would more than once stand wholly silent for minutes together and yet be acting, almost speaking, copiously and lucidly, that whole range of expression being played upon an instrument so cramping as a face in which each feature had to remain, all the while, something strange and remote from its natural self. He could time and modulate and animate the most familiar gesture into a novel expressiveness; when his Tartuffe, in

the first shock of being exposed, felt in the air behind him for a chair-back to lean on, the hackneyed trick looked like a fruit of fresh observation of life ; the dry bones were made to give praise.

In his mouth the French dramatic couplet, that stumbling-block of English youth, was a thing transfigured. Not that its own build and movement, so joltsome or jig-jog to some foreign ears, were disguised. They were revelled in, joyously championed. He practised on the verse a kind of double magic. First he shed over the stiff-seeming lines such colour, diversity, warmth, colloquial quickness, that hearers to whom these French Alexandrines had seemed to fall far short of human vivacity, half wondered whether perhaps the use of rhymed couplets was what human speech, in its longing for heightened expression at crises of feeling, had really been groping for always till now. How apt a fire they had, in Coquelin's mouth, to Cyrano's burning love ! In the great speech below Roxane's window, clause sprang out of clause and line flowed into line with a kind of passionate logic ; the way every phrase was given made some place in your mind ache to be filled by the next. And yet—other half of the magic—all the metrical and rhythmic structure of M. Rostand's verse, or of Molière's, was there. Its stately march was beaten out, like some steadying and fortifying bass, behind

the more free and various melody of the eager spoken word.

The rarest of Coquelin's powers comes third—the sheer comic force with which he embraced and enjoyed the idea of what he was acting. The communicable energy of his joy in all the contents of human nature was incomparable; no comedian in our time has glowed with a more radiant heat of life and delight. To a reader Mascarille's scene with the Précieuses Ridicules may give an impression, amusing certainly, but not wonderful, of a brisk interplay of conscious and unconscious humour. Coquelin's acting brought into it a new and extraordinary light, an ambrosial sunshine of gaiety and gusto; his Mascarille, lolling back among the sofa-cushions, seemed sometimes scarcely to speak at all; relish, mischief, triumph in the mere notion of what he was doing emanated from him more directly than through speech; his eyes beamed till you might think there was some physical emission from them of lucent shafts of high spirits; his laughing voice simmered and bubbled over as if from some huge inner reservoir of audible enjoyment. From the first Coquelin filled these impish valets of Molière and Beaumarchais with a vehemence of life that no one had thought of before; his energy of comic conception amounted to discovery; Prometheus-

like, he lit new kinds of fire for Europe to sit at.

Everything he acted was exciting; abounding life in people always is: and other acting, seen beside his, sank to the dimness of old photographs; it faded in that sunlight. And, like all sunlight, this was benign. It shone with a divine inequity, on the just and the unjust. He would act a character like the "Bourgeois Gentilhomme" with no abating of its meannesses and absurdities; no one, indeed, explored them so exhaustively; and yet he invested the man with a quality of comradeship with the spectator in the joint wonder of being alive. He would make you see characters, otherwise mean and poor, as one sees a child that is naughty with redeeming ardour. His scamps and misers, with their robust faith in the life of roguery or parsimony, might have put shame into men who lived straight but not with a will. All the ways that he saw people live were salt to his zest; when he acted, this relish of his overflowed him and flooded you, and you saw all your kind with a new, delighted sense of the piquancy of our great venture on the earth.

Mr. George Robey is at the head of that one art of the theatre which really lives, with the full

vehemence of life, in England; its shows are crowded because people like them, and not because somebody else does, nor because they think they ought to like them, or that if they can stand them for some time they may yet come to like them. While Mr. Robey is on the stage nearly the whole audience laughs, and part of it deliriously, as you would see people laugh at Toole and other low comedians of genius—not at any one speech or grimace, but at the whole idea of a being so grotesque as the one before them.

Mr. Robey's range of characterization, like that of most of his peers at the halls, is very small, but the study is diabolically intimate, and the execution edged and finished like a cut jewel. He will come on the stage first as that veteran theme, the middle-aged toper in black, frock-coated, tieless and collarless, leering with imbecile knowingness, Stiggins and Bardolph and Ally Sloper in one, his face all bubukles and whelks and knobs and flames o' fire. He will end as the equally trite old woman, also of bibulous aspect, also half cunning, half crazy, a scold, farcical with relics of vanity, ugly as a gargoyle. Nothing could be staler than the matter, nothing more keen with fresh gusto than the craftsman's manner. In a sense Mr. Robey attempts nothing hard; he does not even sketch a character; he only isolates and

caricatures a few odd traits. But the relatively easy task is done amazingly well. He will stand in mid-stage and suggest a dialogue with an invisible second person, he himself uttering no complete speeches, but only the trimmings of speech, the humming and hawing, grinning, bowing, odds and ends of suspensive or stimulatory "Yes," and "Oh, I see!" and "Oh, then," and yet the affluent expressiveness of each inflection and each twitch of a muscle makes everything radiantly clear. What he sings is naught; he might leave it out without taking much from the fun; as he has grown great his music has withered and his patter has grown more and more; the patter is everything now, and yet he says, altogether, wonderfully little; first a word, and then he seems to detect some misplaced laugh in the audience, checks, bridles up, passes in pantomime from tantrum to tantrum, the gusts and squalls of temper coming and going in him visibly. You may call the topics outworn and trivial, the mere words insignificant, the humour metallic, rasping, or worse, but the art, within its limits, is not to be surpassed in its gleaming, elliptical terseness, the volumes it speaks in some instants, its suddenness, fire and zest.

At the theatre everything has a long pedigree; current fashions have sometimes the longest.

Perhaps music-hall performances like Dan Leno's and Mr. Robey's keep nearer than anything else on the West European stage of to-day to the origin of modern professional acting in the Italian "Comedy of Art" of the Renaissance. The old practitioners exploited a few stock butts, as the music-hall men do now; like them, they owed nothing directly to eminent authors; like them, they depended mainly on patter, improvised or crammed up; like them, they started with some little rag of a written part and embroidered upon it as genius might prompt; like them, they were tied pretty fast by convention to certain accepted standard lines of comic observation; they did not go into the streets to note and reproduce some more of their interminable humours—all they might do was to add a gesture here and a phrase there to the traditional business or gag of a roguish valet, or swaggering soldier, or didactic doctor, or cursing father, just as Mr. Robey will leave his little store of shrews and boozers much as he found them. Indeed, some of the sallies that detonate on every week-night in a thousand English music-halls, the old stuff about frumps and termagants and comic tipsiness, may have been going off in Western Europe without a break, except at some festivals of the Church, since some wag first tried them on the Medici at Florence.

Good Acting

Where Mrs. Alving in "Ghosts" stands behind Oswald's chair to hide the despair in her face, and struggles to cheer him with hopeless lies about hope, the beauty of tenderness in Miss Janet Achurch's acting was a thing not to be figured in words, for one art cannot re-do the masterpieces of another. To see it was to grow in experience and bring to life more of your mind; you were born into new, truer knowledge of what the word "tenderness" means. And a praise almost as tall was due to the giant effort of imagination with which Mr. Courtenay Thorpe, as Oswald, lent every corporal agent to the dramatist's purpose. At the most poignant parts of his revelation of his own destruction, you lost consciousness even of the technical brilliancy of the dramatist and of the individual power and subtlety of the two actors. As happens at rare moments in the theatre, the emotion rose to the heat at which first it fuses into one whole, and then, to your sense, consumes clean away the very means of its own presentation —the force or music of words, the fine flexure of gesture and tone, the aptness of surroundings; tragedy burned up the lamp that had held it, and flamed like a star, unconditioned and absolute.

Dramatic Values

When you look, from a little way off, through a closed, uncurtained window of a lighted room, at people sitting or moving within, their movements or their stillness acquire, to your sense, a curious kind of value. They seem slower, graver, more controlled, more significant. Perhaps their soundlessness, to you, gives a less turbid quality to your apprehension of them simply as seen; perhaps your mind is worked upon in some uncharted way by your seeing them while yourself unseen. Whatever the reason, you see them—in more or less measure, according to your mood—de-vulgarized and a little transfigured. Mr. Hardy has used this effect where his Bathsheba watches Gabriel Oak in his cottage; M. Maeterlinck uses it more to the full in his "Intérieur." The Irish actors from the Abbey Theatre have found means to come at a kindred effect of spiritual austerity. More than others, they leave undone the things that ought not to be done. None of them rants or flares, trumpets or booms, or frisks about when he had better be quiet, or puts on intense looks for nothing. They seem all alike to have seized on the truth that the way to do big things in an art, as it is to get into the other parts of the Kingdom of Heaven, is to become as a little child, so long as you do it without thinking all the time what an engaging child you are. Without infantinism, they

contrive to reach back past most of the futilities, the inexpressive apparatus of expression, that overgrow and clog the stage; they take a fresh, clear hold on their craft in its elements. They know how to let well alone; they stand still when others would "cross stage to right" to no purpose; when one of them has to be thrown up in high relief, the rest can fade into the background like mists at a dawn, or emit from their eyes an attention that fixes your eyes on the central figure more surely than the fiercest limelight that ever beat on an actor-manager. So each part is played, in a sense, by them all. One day Miss Allgood, the company's best tragedian, is out of the cast; her part is played by another. You find, to your wonder, how little it matters, and how much of what seemed the actress's poignancy lay in the way the rest looked at her, from simple, held-in attitudes of wonder and apprehension. The substitute, looked at in that way, seems almost as tragic. The actors give you the force of one character through its impression on others, as Homer expressed Helen's beauty through its effect on the aged men, and as Thackeray tells you what every one did when Beatrix entered a playhouse.

In a world of things overdone, like the stage, mere quietude has the value of epigram, like a thing soberly said in a newspaper. Throughout

one-half of Lady Gregory's "Rising of the Moon" there is scarcely a movement: merely that no one should strut or fret tickles you. Miss Maire O'Neill, as Nora, in "The Shadow of the Glen," stands almost stock still through a scene where most English actresses would pace the stage like lionesses in a zoo. The result is that when she does move you can see the passion propel her like a screw. In Mr. Yeats's "Kathleen ni Houlihan" the average stage manager would have thought everything under-acted; he would have made the whole cast sweat and squirm up to the climax in a geometrical progression of muscular agonies, lest the emotion should not cross the footlights. The Irishmen keep still and white, and tragic consequence enfolds them: set on that ground of grave and simple composure, the slightest gesture carries you far in divination of what prompts it; whole scenes put on a comely vesture of delicacy and containment and a haunting expressiveness, as, in the painting of some masters, every tree, you know not how, has its hamadryad.

But the pleasantness of this Irish acting is compounded of many simples. Another of them is the savour of English spoken with the wary relish of the semi-foreigner, whose tongue the words seem to interest, not to bore, as English sounds seem to bore the vocal organs of draggle-tongued

Cockneys. There is no slurring; vowels are not dismissed from the service and all their work thrown upon one or two slatternly diphthongs, fagged maids-of-all-work. In the Gaelic mouth some latent fear of going wrong brings minor syllables out into unaccustomed distinctness; weak final vowels are given their own with a curious precision. All this reassertion of neglected values and half-lost distinctions has an effect, not of dialect, since the word smacks of corruption or smudginess; rather that of a quaint and delicate archaism. And perhaps this manner of speech is, indeed, less a variant from English speaking of to-day than a survival of a manner general here in Shakspere's time, or near it, just as the Irish rustic syntax and vocabulary now come nearer than the London of to-day to the Elizabethan prime of the language.

Another simple is a temper brought, you would say, by the actors to their work. Of course they accept the intended mood of each play, as musicians accept a composer's; but, like good musicians, they still see that mood through a mood of their own; temperament is at play upon temperament. Theirs, so far as they have one in common, seems not quite romantic, for that makes you think about Irving, from whom their remoteness is infinite; nor mournfully tender, like

Maeterlinck's, nor yet Tolstoyan, like Tolstoy's. It is distinct as any of these, and to the non-Irish playgoer it has the sharp charm of something equally strange and simple. Comedy or tragedy, the actors seem to move through it as if Burke's "Shadows we are, and shadows we pursue" were not a flourish in a book, but common knowledge. They walk and speak like people visited by a half-wonder whether the next thing to do is, after all, such a great matter: action and speech are faintly chilled and refined by a touch as of feyness, a melancholy exaltation; you think of the tunes that Irish bands play until midnight in country towns during elections—tunes that seem as if some Hamlet's musings over the "Rule Britannias" and "Marseillaises" of other nations might be set to them.

Not every palate will care for these flavours, certainly none that finds the older "stage Irishman" natural. Before he can count at his worth, the quite real Irishman, acted, has to drive out of your head the half-real Irishmen of Thackeray and even Lever, the Costigans and Micky Frees, as they in their day had dislodged the yet less real O'Regans and O'Triggers of Smollett and Sheridan, their bulls and their "Arrah, by Jasus, now," these in their turn having dispossessed Tudor and Stuart stage Irishmen, the Captain Macmorrises with

their "By Chrish la" and "Tish ill done." Each new approach to the truth, as it comes, makes the one that preceded look foolish; but each, before being ousted, tries to show fight; to-day the last generation's stage Irishman, he with a pipe in his hat, and "Faix" or "Bedad" at every third word, still stands up for himself in English people's minds, against the living Irish peasants of the Abbey Theatre. He does it at the advantage that high false colour usually has in competition with a grading and qualifying veracity. The Irishmen of the English theatre have been a race of "character parts"; to playgoers reared on untruths so flamboyant any good portraiture of Irishmen is apt to seem anæmic and low-pitched, as natural complexions might look to eyes fed on the sight of the noses presented by Mr. George Robey.

Mr. Henry Austin is the best English Stockmann in "An Enemy of the People." His turbid spate of speech is the very thing—a kind of short-winded fluency, copious and breathless at the same time, a shambling volubility, a stumbling gallop of the tongue. In his talk the emphases and the pauses are often fearfully and wonderfully, but still significantly, distributed, neither musically nor according to the sense, but with traceable periodic pulsations,

suggesting some large, labouring engine of goodwill throbbing half-frustratedly in the capacious bosom. To eye and ear he presents the true and perfect fusion of moral grandeur and mental woolliness into one great muddled soul, a noble goose or heroic owl: you get the full interplay of clear, long sight for the things that are more excellent and of mere peery, blear-eyed fumbling at the trifles that are clear to every one else, the ordinary working meannesses, and cowardices of existence. Another trait nicely drawn is the good soul's lack, or even inversion, of the instinct for pose. Mr. Austin is capital at the points where Dr. Stockmann, when most sublime in essentials, dabs a sudden touch of grotesqueness into the picture of exaltation, with some little fit of child's crossness, mere mad waste of effect as it must seem to amateurs of the *beau rôle*.

Sarah Bernhardt is sadly deranging to critical austerity. When she is not there, one can judicially count up her sins against her art. She "stars," trying more to outshine than to shine; it was she who made Sardou write worst; she will hardly ever act "Phèdre"; she rushes up and down the world, working half as much again as she should; she chooses new plays as if it were

nothing to her whether she acts a masterpiece or trash. She has tricks of tongue that are horrors in memory; she will tear through a beautiful tragic speech as if she were Mr. George Grossmith in comic opera, pattering against time; or, for contrast, she will retail a passage, word by word, with a full stop after each, till they sound like stones slowly dropped into a well; or, against nature and the French language, she will turn all her vowels into open vowels, speaking "je ne sais pas" as if it were "j—enn—ess—aip—as"; or she will force into tropical overgrowth her own devices and graces, such as the melodious phrasing of a speech into groups of rhythmic syllables, with little abrupt halts, lingerings on a note, and fresh launchings out upon some new trailing or hammering cadence. These faults are rank; they cry to Heaven—when she is not there. Then you see her act once more, and you feel as if you were looking again at Florence from Fiesole, or at a pheasant's neck, or Leonardo's Monna Lisa, or ripe corn with poppies in it. In absence you may have asked were these things really so fine, or might not a change here and a change there have made them finer; present, you only enjoy, you ask nothing. It is like that when Marguerite tries to stand up to greet Armand, in the last act of "La Dame aux Camélias"; it is like that in

Sardou's "Sorcière," when Zoraya runs to meet Enrique; only one actress in Europe—in France or England, at any rate—seems to conceive with that energy of sympathy the enthusiasm of affection; at least, only one can convey it with this sudden fire that makes you see, as with the bodily eye, the whole soul of the one lover leap up with joy at rejoining the other.

That you will see Mr. Forbes Robertson walk down and, especially, across the stage is a sufficient reason for going to a theatre. One thinks of him as Othello descending to rebuke the brawl, traversing the air on a raised way, a boldly silhouetted figure of austere handsomeness, stalking nobly in profile. His speech is in the great tradition without the booming that infested it. His use of the arms in rhetoric has the severe beauty that some of the great orators must have had, since nothing else can explain the terms in which some of those who heard them wrote of this part of their execution. The beauty of each gesture and tone is almost abstract in its purity; the raised arm, did it mean nothing, is still a lovely line; the cadences have the independent, absolute values of music; they would please though you did not know English. His is the acting that mainly

relies for its charm on measure, a comely order, "discretion," "smoothness," "temperance," the "modesty" of nature, all the set of qualities that Hamlet praised to the players. It has not the surprises, the thrilling unreason, the penetrative intimacy, the touch of victorious arrogance—the set of qualities that Charlotte Brontë, in "Villette," ascribed to the great actress. When he plays Hamlet, he seems to air and tidy up this monstrous Gothic castle of a poem, with its baffled half-lights and glooms. As Romeo, he no doubt, would not, if he could, drag Paris's body into the grave as Irving, the romantic, did it—a thing of curious vivid horror, jarring your imagination into furious activity. He never tries, as naturalistic actors do, by some sudden turn of queer, uncontestable veracity, to shake you into a troubling and importunate consciousness of the presence of life. It is not in his art to trouble; rather to tranquillize; it soothes you like some Augustan architecture, with its just proportions, the ranged masses of its declamation, its expression of dependence on sound reason, lucidity, intellectual balance.

Romantic acting, like other romantic art, is adventure, almost gambling; it comes off and it seems to have found new worlds, or lit on the door of magic, or it fails and flops into grotesqueness. Classical acting like Mr. Forbes Robert-

son's runs lesser risks; it may not take your breath away, or send a momentary wave of coldness across your face, or elicit whatever your special bodily signal may be of your mind's amazed and sudden surrender to some stroke of passionate genius. But there is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon. This acting, at least, never makes you yawn: and it never amuses you meanly; indeed, you might almost wholly describe it by negatives, in terms of the trances of imaginative exploration that it does not easily give you, and also of the inflation, feverishness, turbidity that it never approaches. Or you might say that this art is less like that of one artist of rare gift than of a commission of artists highly accomplished: it is what they would all unite in approving, so far as it goes; it has no freakish faults; it is standardized. Or you might just take Pater's wording, and say that the principle you find ruling it is that of order in beauty as distinct from that of strangeness of beauty.

The Well-made Play

DURING the long reign of the French "well-made piece" the voice of its makers was seldom stilled on the darling theme of how they did it. They lectured on it, and wrote prefaces, and the interviewer went not empty away. Like simple, truthful conjurors—men who are always admitting that rabbits come out of their hats without Divine interposition—"Simply the perfection of my method, ladies and gentleman, nothing more"—they disclaimed inspiration; they made out that they were only doing a kind of sums; only, like naturalists, inferring the whole of a good-sized unknown beast from the modest premise of one knuckle-bone.

Then would follow technical instructions. An unwritten play, said Sardou, always appeared to him as a kind of philosophic equation from which the unknown term had to be disengaged; he held that "once the formula for this was found, the piece followed of itself." At this point young

France is apt in these later days to interject idiomatically "Chansons!" and yet there is a sense in what Sardou says. Consider his own play "La Sorcière," how it grows. Imagine its germ, the first thought, the very practical thought —"What will make a good harrowing climax for Sarah Bernhardt?" Well, he might start from a standard melodramatic horror— a condemnation of the innocent to death. How, then, to sharpen its poignancy? Make the death burning; that's something. What next? Make her convict herself to save a lover. Good!—what next? Make her feel that in killing herself to save her lover, she is merely leaving him in a rival's arms. Excellent!—anything more? Yes, deprive her of the consolation of knowing or hoping that the lover will ever understand her sacrifice or value her memory. That is the way the climax of a tragic "machine" may be devised, by a cumulative process of invention. The climax once there, the plot issues out of it, backward; each step "disengages" itself. Burning?—that means the time of the Inquisition. A lover who shall be set free at a word from a mistress on trial herself and about to be burnt? How shall you make her word so potent to save him, so powerless to save herself? Only by making the lady a Moor, a heathen, the man a Christian Spaniard so framed

to please the Holy Office that they will fairly jump at a chance to let him off. But how shall she be made, while clearing him, to damn herself quite in his eyes and to root out all love of her from his heart? Nothing for it but to make her avow herself, in his hearing, a witch, and confess she has used hellish arts to make him in love with her. Yes, but she must not have verily used hellish art; she must not be really a witch; else, where will your audience's sympathies be? And so, of necessity, this Moorish lady of 1507 must practice therapeutic hypnotism in order to scandalize sixteenth-century Toledo, but must also talk twentieth-century science about it, so that the audience may know she is only a female Charcot, born rather soon, and not a veritable Witch of Endor. Thus are the unknown terms of Sardou's equation disengaged; the whole of "La Sorcière" follows of its own accord.

Or take another case of machine-making, that of Jules Sandeau's "Mademoiselle de la Seiglière." Sandeau, one fancies, started with a bright notion for a third-act situation in a four-act play—the sudden discovery of mutual love by a man and a woman of different social rank and political feeling, the man bound by a filial sentiment of revenge not to fall in love with the woman, and the woman bound by a previous betrothal not to

fall in love with the man. When Augier lit on an idea like this, for the end of a last act but one, he chuckled. "L'affaire," he said, "est dans le sac." Doubtless Sandeau did likewise. His fourth act needed small thought; it would come of itself, given the other three, it being the nature of last acts merely to sweep up the crockery smashed at the climax of last acts but one. The first act, of course, must be all explanations. But explanations of what? The answers disengage themselves from the very nature of the smash in Act III. Different social grades and political feelings? Clearly a case for the old clash of well-born Legitimist and plebeian Bonapartist. Filial vengeance to be wreaked by a son of one of these upon a daughter of the other? Plainly your chance is in the seismic dispossessions, redistributions and restitutions of French real estate between the outbreak of the Revolution and the final return of the Legitimist emigrants. When by this process, carried straight on, you have deduced a Royalist Marquis, with one fair daughter, in actual but not legal possession of an estate belonging, under the Code Napoléon, to the unexpectedly surviving son of an ill-used person of lowly origin, your first act begins to write itself, for it must unfold these circumstances. Characters, too, are disengaged from the "philosophic equation." Real property and the Code Napoléon imply a

lawyer, to instruct the young claimant to the estates. But in a well-made cast a lawyer cannot be wasted on law alone. People in well-made casts have to work for their places. The obvious work for him to fill up his time with is that of the friend who, by old dramatic tradition, keeps up to the mark, the vindictive mark, the hero who wavers between love and vengeance. The child of the people having thus obtained a bottle-holder, balance necessitates one for the other combatant, the Marquis. Well, as his daughter was first to be betrothed to a man of her own rank, and as she and her father call out, in any case, to be balanced by this young man and his mother, why not make this dowager work double tides too, like the lawyer, and be the Marquis's second and adviser in the conflict. Then the lawyer and this lady, being thus set at one another, must be furnished with some vitriolic dispute of their own, to keep them hard at it; so the lawyer shall be her old, scornfully rejected suitor. And there, with just one footman to get people into rooms and say the things that have to be said, but do not quite come rightly from anyone else, is Sandeau's whole cast, and, in outline, his whole play; and the cohesion and compactness of plays thus evolved were, until the disturber Ibsen came, the modern European ideal of dramatic craftsmanship.

Of course you find considerable and often de-

lightful differences between one well-made piece and another, as they unwind their orderly coils. Labiche is charmingly unlike Sandeau. "Le Voyage de M. Perrichon," a good Labiche, is very buxom, blithe and debonair, and most alertly witty. It has, it is true, a rick in its back, caused by violent extension in infancy from three acts to four, but it has characterization and even a tincture of philosophy, and you enjoy the cunning of the good workman even in the act of spoiling his own work by lugging in the inorganic Zouave and the whole affair of the duel; it takes a master-joiner to make such a mess of a play, without making more. "Mademoiselle de la Seiglière," not so gay as a Labiche, is a regular Kriegspiel of motives and counter-motives wilily set by the ears; the whole Landwehr and Landsturm of the armies of drawing-room intrigue march and counter-march, turn flanks and drive in fronts, like good ones; a silence sinks on the house as it bends up each intellectual agent to the feat of seeing why Destournelles first feared that Bernard would marry Hélène and then hoped it, and how the Baronne de Vaubert first brought Bernard into rivalry with her son, and then ceased to dread him, and then dreaded him again.

Again, in Pailleron's "L'Étincelle" lively comedy rests on quite sound psychology. Original and

excellent comic use is made of the fact that speech and gesture are not merely symbols of feeling but modes of feeling, and that when you use them you do not merely interpret pre-existing emotions, but also set emotional processes in operation, every emotion being modified by its own expression, while some emotions may be so rapidly developed by their expression, even their histrionic expression, that they seem almost to be born of it.

Bisson, without the sap and sunniness of the humane Labiche, or the pretty genial sparkle that Meilhac had "on his day," perfected a rather mechanical brilliancy and malice of comic invention. No one could imagine queerer fixes for his characters, or work them out with less waste of their comic possibilities. After his "Surprises du Divorce" the theatre ought to have relinquished, as a completed work, its immemorial preoccupation with the mother-in-law. All other dramatic handlings of that theme are leaflets to this treatise, mere tentative borings into that seam of comic effect, compared with this capacious and branching mine. With "Les Surprises du Divorce" a topic was played out, and though we may all be bored by later farcical hits at the mother-in-law, "Les Surprises" always seems piquant; it has the lasting freshness of the best thing of a kind.

And yet, granted the diverse animation of a

score of nineteenth-century French dramatists, there does appear in that period a remarkable co-existence of elaborate and precise technical theory and of poorness or shallowness of spirit. Scribe's soul, where it ventures out at all, looks like that of some mean player for safety, a "sensible man of the world," a thinker of what may be thought with the least inconvenience, an exalter of the current, the accepted, the easy, as wisdom and virtue. The younger Dumas taught from half-knowledge and preached without elevation. Augier, a striking example, could not be content to purl and prattle like the agreeable minor brook that he was: he tried to play the Jordan, to be august, momentous, baptismal. The history of his play "L'Aventurière," which he wrote in his youth and re-wrote when past forty, is full of suggestion. There were those who thought, even in 1860, that second thoughts spoilt a quite good boyish play, a piece of the headlong felicity sometimes brought off by writers when young, just because they are young; their spirits are high; their delight in the way others write is so fresh that they copy with gusto, not tamely; they are not yet dulled by finding they scarcely know anything. The first draft of "L'Aventurière" was one of these April productions; it worked on the somewhat dust-strewn spirit of Sarcey, the critic, until he would babble

of green fields, dew, the opening eyelids of the morn, auroral things of all sorts. Then a fatal wisdom entered into Augier. He had walked, more or less, in the ways of his heart and in the sight of his eyes; now he must needs bring himself into judgment, and half the world too; so he deepened, or thickened, the tone of his piece, turned comedy to "*drame*" — that thing so different from "drama"—made his old guy of a love-sick dotard a quite tragic person, and set up in form as a critic of life and a scourge of the wicked, or some of the wicked.

There may be a time to put away childish things: there is certainly one to refrain from so doing. Augier's was not the time to turn a light-hearted small play of intrigue into a mighty invocation of "vengeance on Jenny's case." Augier grew serious perversely, only to show what a foul wrong it was for "adventuresses" to derange the peace of substantial middle-class houses; the wretches, to Augier's gathering wrath, did not shrink from wishing that some one might marry them, rescue them out of the street; and how splendid it was when the son of the house used his air of the conquering *mâle*, and his wit, and his well-hung philandering tongue, and his own wide practice in streets (J'ai fatigué mon cœur," the noble fellow says, "à tous les carrefours") to fool and abase

and repel into outer darkness that troublesome asker for help to live well. So thought Augier, like the young Dumas; to them, adventuresses were so many Colorado beetles; art's duty was simply to keep them away from the crops, and the stronger the caustic treatment the better. Well, it still seems quite clever when Fabrice, the good son, the retired rake, dupes and confounds and finally lectures Clorinde. Yet something has gone wrong since 1860; one finds one is laughing upon the wrong side of one's mouth; whether it be Mr. Shaw, or the Zeitgeist, or mere continued incidence of evidence on reluctant ears, something tells people now that Clorindes are Clorindes because Fabrices are Fabrices. When a prodigal who "has had so many mistresses that one day he woke up to find he had nothing left but a sword," comes home and preaches on the text—

"On doit le même outrage
Aux femmes sans pudeur qu'aux hommes sans courage,
Car le droit au respect, la première grandeur,
Pour nous c'est le courage et pour vous la pudeur,"

one only feels now that the kicks already received by the preacher from fortune cry out to be supplemented by the human foot. Who is he, to wave a fellow-sinner back to the husks that the swine do eat?

We have got so far past Jew-baiting in Western Europe that Shakspere's intention in Shylock has to be turned inside out in the acting for people to stand it. When cleansing and virilizing work like "One of our Conquerors" gets us past courtesan-baiting as well, we fear it will not be worth while to turn much of Augier inside out too, for he has an outside indeed, but no inside, or little. All that does not matter much he can do very well. How pat the rhymes are that the properly schooled French actors deliver so patly; how lucid the plot; how multitudinous the small sparkles of verbal vivacity; how droll, in an established way, the drinking-bout; how knowingly the touch of demi-semi-pathos is measured out to the adventuress at last! Throw the first stone at her? Why, of course we must, and many more; only let us drop a magnanimous tear while we throw. Such was Augier, a soul like a batsman who knows quite well how to walk to the wicket, buttoning a glove as he goes, and to pat the pitch flat with his bat, and to walk from the wicket again the right way, duly breaking into a run, and to raise his cap just at the right distance from the pavilion—who knows, in fact, everything but how to bat. Like his Fabrice he does "un peu de tout, hors de ce qu'il faut faire."

Let us not be unjust to these minor accomplishments. Still, they are minor. And that was the

mark of the well-made piece as a whole—to be great in minor respects and minor in great ones. Not, of course, trivial in one way *because* it was fine in another. Always beware of the sentimental disdain of good craftsmanship as something over against and at war with the soul's higher energies. But somehow the well-made pieces had brought technics and ideas—both of them things calling out to be perfected—into a wrong relation. Was it that the trick of conceiving first of a play's emotional climax condemned that very climax to relative poorness or middlingness, since the supreme things of this kind are conceived at a heat that only comes at the culmination of a sustained, ascending effort of imaginative architecture? Is it only when he is sweating and glowing and breathing deeply with the fight against technical difficulties, against the half-thwarting, half-inspiring reluctancy of matter, as the artist knows matter, that visions like that of Desdemona's death-scene will visit the dramatist's mind? Sardou and his kind thought to redeem dramatists from their share of Adam's curse—to convert into a smooth mathematical demonstration the obscure and desperate struggle of the craftsman with the obstacles to beauty in the thing that he dimly dreams he may fashion. Perhaps the curse is a condition of the glory; perhaps it is not a curse; we merely surmise, without any assurance.

Some Plays of Mr. G. B. Shaw

"IT is horrid fun," R. L. Stevenson wrote to Mr. Archer, who had sent him a novel of Mr. Shaw's; "all I ask is more of it . . . and tell me more of the inimitable author." Any open-witted playgoer feels similar raptures of discovery when first hearing one of Mr. Shaw's plays. A piece like "Candida" is almost a prediction; it reaches forward to a theatre rescued from the vested stupidities which go so far to keep our theatre dull. Dramatic satire has long been almost impotent here, because it scarcely ever tackles a subject worth scarifying; it keeps to poor, obvious, used-up butts whom everybody is already almost tired of deriding—a mobbed rabbit of a "Private Secretary," burlesque "new women," farcical "self-made men" on their promotion, any sort of crank or quack fantastic or transparent enough to be assured of quite enough ridicule already. Mr. Shaw wastes no powder on these small deer; he fastens, or fastened at first, on the vices that matter, because credulous good

souls confuse them with the virtues of which they are the special parasites. In "Candida," for example, he studied with shrewdness and humour what, on the analogy of "potter's paralysis" and "match-maker's jaw," might be called "altruist's egoism," the kind of booming, trumpeting satisfaction in one's own portrait of oneself that is apt to infest Parliaments, town councils, pulpits, and most places where good is done, or attempted, in public. With the same shrewdness and humour he dissected the general and respectable vice of living, not perhaps by phrases alone, but by unexamined phrases out of all proportion to reasoned beliefs or profound emotions.

In the Rev. James Morell, the central character of "Candida," Mr. Shaw takes no mere scarecrow of hypocrisy and blatancy. Judged by common, unexacting standards, Morell would pass for a rather good specimen of the modern virile parson, with a "brief, bright, and breezy" manner, hearty gestures, democratic sympathies, a grenadier chest and a reassuring and bracing air of desire that you should cheer up and rely on it that he is a man and a brother. The type, at its best, is excellent, of course; what Mr. Shaw dissects is a subtle variant on it, or perversion of it. By a proper train of incident Morell is winnowed and found to consist almost exclusively of branny phrases. In his

own mind he has come to arrange his universe into a deliciously exhilarating *tableau*—himself in the middle, unfeignedly beneficent, justly adored, curates speeding at his bidding, typewriters typewriting for love of him, an idolizing wife to "lean on" him, large congregations to hang on his lips—all the pleasant perquisites of a great force for good. We are to feel the sounding emptiness of this parasitic soul that subsists on the willingness of others to pay attention to it, and then the bewilderment and horror of its owner when a universe which ought to go on with its ministrations to his complacency suddenly ceases to act.

The smash begins when Marchbanks, the wisp of a boyish poet, hands back as bad some verbiage of Morell's best minting, and Morell rushes in panic from phrase to phrase in a frenzied attempt to find one that will produce the old effect, always countered by Marchbanks's passionate rejection of the whole currency. Then Morell's wife, Candida, —much the same placid, unalarmed, controlling woman who elsewhere in Mr. Shaw's plays composedly lets out the gas from male vapourings and histrionics—reinforces Marchbanks's onslaught by showing Morell in the most kindly maternal fashion that she has been looking on with amusement, and quite without illusion, at his doings among the phrases, and at the general burning of incense

before him. Here, as a satirical study of character, the play almost ends. In the last act Mr. Shaw, with any amount of alertness and audacity, makes a feint at extricating himself from the odd hole into which his plot has led him, but the play does not really complete itself; it merely apologizes for not going on, and the apology has a touch of the sentimentality which is Mr. Shaw's dread, or one of his dreads. Still, the play, though broken off short as a play, is a finished masterpiece of satiric observation, not through books, newspapers, and other plays, as is commonest in our theatre, but at first hand.

The only trouble for the spectator, apart from the weak ending, is that Mr. Shaw cannot make Marchbanks talk up to his part. Marchbanks is to be a young Shelley; his talk is to be Shelleyan, at any rate poetic, and Mr. Shaw sees this and does his best to write non-metrical poetry for Marchbanks to speak. But Mr. Shaw's writing, while it has no stupidities, has no beauties; the fairies seem to have made a very strict arrangement, before his birth, that the ones with force, lucidity and mordacity to give away to new-born infants should all be there, and that all the ones with sensuous lovelinesses of any kind in their gift should stay away. So when Mr. Shaw makes his young poet talk "softly and musically, but sadly

and longingly" of a "a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun; where the south wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets," we salute an honest effort, but also we feel that, as Holofernes said of Biron's verses, "Here are only numbers ratified; but, for the elegancy, facility, and golden cadence of poesy, caret." It is as if a master of positive clearness and directness like Huxley had attempted, with that equipment, to do Keats's work, or as if Comte had tried to write a Song of Solomon. When Mr. Shaw, the rationalist, the determinist, the literalist, the man who thinks, as Tybalt fenced, "by the book of arithmetic," essays the description of golden dreams, the result is a chill or a bewilderment.

If you had never seen another English play of to-day you could still learn a good deal about the state of our stage by seeing any passable performance of "Arms and the Man." For now and then you would see that the audience was put off, and, seeing what had put it off, you would justly infer that it had come out to see the same thing done in the opposite way. For example, Mr. Shaw, having here taken a soldier for his hero, presents him

pretty much as soldiers are, to themselves or to one another, or to people who have seen a good deal of them, like Napoleon. The Shaw soldier marches and fights, like the real man, "with his stomach"; other things being equal, he prefers life to death; he is sleepy after being awake for two nights; his nerves show wear and tear after fighting for three days on end. Now, when Mr. Shaw's soldier showed these traits, we distinctly heard a deep, indignant voice in the dress circle say: "*Such* an idea of a soldier!" And in that moment, in that bitter cry, the regular soldier-hero of our stage stood revealed. It was evidently felt by the indignant person that after forty-eight hours of fasting a soldier, if accurately represented, would not care to eat, and that after seventy-two hours of watching and fighting he would not jump when startled. Every soldier, or person who ever knew half a dozen soldiers, knows that this ideal soldier of the dress circle is sawdust; no army, for one thing, could stand him; unless he put on the failings of humanity he would be "ragged" by his mess, and not without excuse. And yet the dramatists dramatize falsely and the dress-circle will have it so; the soldier-hero of convention increases and multiplies, and when the audience does not get him so, but done from the life, it says: "*Such* an idea of a soldier!"

Under a course of Mr. Shaw playgoers are sharpening their wits, but they still seem nearly always to be misled a little at the start by any play of his. They find him busy inflating some little balloonful of emotional gas, and for a time they do not quite see that it is only there to be deflated in due season. Observe an average audience during this first act of "Arms and the Man." The story is that of two young people who at the date of flotation, as the money articles say, are much over-capitalized in the romantic-sentimental department. The girl, Raina, gradually and reluctantly "reconstructs," if we may keep up the financial metaphor. The man, Sergius, having a finer natural turn for moral ventriloquism as well as a super-Byronic blatancy of soul, tries to bluff the thing right through, and bumps his head against the wall accordingly. You will find it pretty clear that a good part of your average audience in the first act sympathizes warmly with the two gas-bags then swelling. During the second act it will veer round, and in the third the laughter and applause, at the right places, may be warm and almost continuous. The strange point of view has by that time been attained, the idiom of the new commentator on experience mastered. But it needs all Mr. Shaw's wit and malice to make up for the drawback of having thus to work his audience out

of a pre-existing state of mind before he can have them with him. Hence, no doubt, the slow advent of his popularity. This ultra-sensible, only too matter-of-fact, writer, had to get us owls accustomed to the daylight before he could do anything with us.

There is an odd contrast between the hullabaloo that there was when "Widowers' Houses" was first acted by the Independent Theatre in 1892 and the unqualified applause and laughter which receive it now. One knows what a grinding noise a new tram-car may make on the setts till it finds its own place on the rails. But really the hubbub of hooting and squabbling that attended Mr. Shaw's gradual accession to his right place among the dramatists seems rather ludicrous in retrospect. "Widowers' Houses" is one of his less good plays, but how it should scandalize anybody—except some quietist who had expected *all* sermons on the members-one-of-another text to be soporifics to his conscience—is difficult to understand. It is not a good sermon, really, any more than other plays of Mr. Shaw's are good sermons; for pure satire, though perhaps as good a thing as preaching, will not serve the special purposes of preaching. From seeing Mr. Shaw acted, as from reading

Juvenal, or Swift, or any perfect satirist, you come away, not with any constructive impulse or positive stimulation, but with a more or less near approach to the conclusion of Mr. Chevalier's philosopher: "Wot's the good of annyfink? Why, nuffink!" But how anyone, not disreputable himself, could impugn the ethics of "Widowers' Houses" passes understanding.

Among the plays of Mr. Shaw "You Never Can Tell" has something like the place of "The Wild Duck" among Ibsen's. Like "The Wild Duck" it often seems to pooh-pooh ideas that are generally taken to be the author's own; it must have given uncomfortable moments to some good souls who thought they were quite "advanced" and Shawesque until they found Mr. Shaw roaring with laughter at their poor little, old-fashioned attempts at modernity. The one thing about the play which Mr. Shaw must have meant in all gravity was the loves of Valentine and Gloria; and, alas! our misguided audiences are still apt to laugh at that most solemnly meant of his touches, just at the end, where Gloria, in accordance with the Shaw theory of love, suddenly turns round at the last moment to grasp her retreating lover, much as Ann in "Man and Superman" puts down a

peremptory claw on the escaping Tanner. All the part in the second act, where Valentine and Gloria discuss their own symptoms and sensations of dread, helplessness, etc., is, we fancy, the pure milk of the Shavian word on the subject. It gives you, more clearly than anything else he has written, his favourite conception of the love of men and women as something a good deal smaller and lower than the Coleridgian ideal of a "sacred flame" ministered to by the whole universe of other thoughts and feelings, and at the same time a good deal larger and higher than elementary animal desire. The romantics, at one end of the scale, treat love as an exaltation of the lover's whole nature, which is raised to a higher power of itself and achieves self-completion in acts of courage, generosity and self-devotion impossible to it except under this inspiration. At the other end of the scale you have Guy de Maupassant, in one of his moods, and one or two of the Restoration dramatists, with their jaunty conclusion—the last word of formulated sensualism—that to a man "every woman is the same." Declining both these views Mr. Shaw presents love as an unstable troubling and excitement of sense and imagination, under which the patients are helplessly paired off by a "life force" which, however, selects its pairs pretty carefully. As Valentine says: "It's a

curiously helpless sensation . . . as if Nature, after allowing us to belong to ourselves and do what we judged right and reasonable for all these years, were suddenly lifting her great hand to take us—her two little children—up by the scruff of our little necks, and use us, in spite of ourselves, for her own purposes, in her own way." In the theatre this theorizing does not usually come out very clearly; people laugh too much to follow it, and perhaps people are right, for Mr. Shaw's serious thinking is just about the ordinary staple quality of that of the best-educated modern people, but his wit is genius. He himself sometimes seems to incline for a moment to the belief of devoted friends that his comic gifts are merely vehicles for the conveyance of a large, coherent system of original thought on human life and institutions. No doubt Juvenal thought he was an expert in moral philosophy, and Swift took his own derision of Wood's Halfpence for a sound contribution to economics. It is the way of satirists of genius, when they write a masterpiece, to hug the belief that it is a competent pamphlet on some stodgy current topic.

The thought recurs when you see "Cæsar and Cleopatra." The play's effect on one's mind is certainly not the continuous stir and stimulation that comes of seeing "You Never Can Tell," or

"Candida," or "Captain Brassbound's Conversion." Of course this is not to say that the play is dull. In a play of its date mere avoidance of the stock dabs of local colour produces an effect of positive piquancy; mere abstinence from blank verse amounts to a liveliness. Cleopatra's speeches, too, are written with Mr. Shaw's full humour, and the little gem of a character of Britannus shows what he can do when he lets the zestful mischief which is his strength have its fling. But some of Cæsar's allocutions, his almost direct allocutions, to the audience make one think how dangerous it may be for Prosperoes to let their Ariels off duty for the day and act the sages and reformers without the assistance of skilled impishness. Of course, Mr. Shaw's idea of presenting a Cæsar brought abreast of the latest results of Mommsenite research and conjecture is engaging, and the figure is constructed with ingenuity and has well-written things to say. But then Mr. Shaw unsmilingly urging a theory and constructing a serious type is only as one competent workman among several, a very different thing from the unique satirist who tears the Broadbents and Morells to pieces in a frenzy, a beautifully controlled and utilized frenzy, of delighted contempt. In writing the part of Cæsar Mr. Shaw two or three times positively achieves an un-

designed prosiness. The play, too, has a common failing of its Elizabethan predecessors in the "chronicle history" line—that is, the pressure of historical and military crises is not suggested without a good deal of stamping in and out and chopping and changing of scenes, and general hubbub and clatter of a kind unpropitious to that intimacy of relation with the spectator which Mr. Shaw's art, at its best, asks for.

Towards the end of "Captain Brassbound's Conversion" Mr. Shaw exhibits in a parable the anguish of the romance-fed mind—that is, the mind of the average playgoer—when some Shaw comes to stop its commons of pretty illusion and put it on a training diet of the proper proteids, albuminoids and so on, duly proportioned and, as the patient is apt to feel, almost lethally hygienic. Drinkwater in the parable is about to see his cherished "Sweeny Todd, the Demon Barber," "The Skeleton Horseman," and two other kindred fruits of the imagination, his entire provision for the nourishment of his tall spirit, committed to the flames, like the earlier romantic library of Don Quixote. "Down't burn 'em," howls the agonized idealist; "yer dunno wot them books is to me. They formed maw mawnd: they shaowed me

sathink awghe rthan the squalor of a corster's lawf. Lidy, lidy, sy a word for me. 'Ev a feelin' awt." Lady Cecily Waynflete, the divinity thus invoked, does intercede and—the Court being susceptible—Drinkwater saves his portion of the things of the mind, and retires snivelling "Thenk yer, lidy," comfortedly.

Even thus may the romantic playgoer, at the end of "Captain Brassbound's Conversion," retire from the theatre, having, beyond all hope, got back a bit of his own, as the saying is, from Mr. Shaw, "even as the shepherd saveth from the mouth of the lion two legs and a piece of an ear." By the same means as Drinkwater, too, has he recovered it, for there are some heroines of Mr. Shaw's own make to whom Mr. Shaw can refuse nothing. He will go round, like gardeners at night, with a lantern and a can of caustic solution, sousing in the can every pitiful small slug of sentimentalism that the lantern can find; you might think him as fancy-free as John Knox; and then, the next instant, he meets, in his own works, some managing, mothering Candida or Cecily, and he collapses in one piece before her. Why, he might be Thackeray, and she Amelia Sedley. No more slug-hunting that night. From explaining that law is mere vengeance and vengeance mere bunkum, the satirist who began "Captain Brass-

bound" turns to lay his whips, his scorpions, his carbolic acid, the whole plant of his satiric business, idle at the feet of one of those ladies who rush upon and darn at sight any and every worn coat or sock, urged by some imperious instinct within them.

Not wholly a bad job either. For, though "Captain Brassbound" is nothing to "Mrs. Warren's Profession," or even to "Widowers' Houses," as a piece of observation or of thought, or as a discomfort to lazy consciences, still, these finer, more searching, more salutary things do seem to you, in some moods, unquestionably tough, may even strike you as the grass, in the prize poem, struck Nebuchadnezzar—

> "He murmured, as he chewed the unwonted food,
> 'It may be wholesome, but it is not good;'"

whereas a piece of attempted thinking like "Captain Brassbound," first agreeably devastated by Lady Cecily as conceived and adored by Mr. Shaw, and then re-devastated by the sprightly improvisations of Miss Ellen Terry, might rival "The Mikado" or Mr. Pelissier as a raiser of spirits depressed by the day's labour in the mart.

"John Bull's Other Island" gave Mr. Shaw his first vogue with uncritical people to add to the vogue he had always enjoyed with the others. It is seldom easy to gain for any first-rate, non-imitative new talent the toleration, not to say the applause, of the general public of the theatres. The glory of the feat in Mr. Shaw's case should perhaps be divided between (1) the small but resolute corps of volunteer trumpeters who cried him up for many years in the wilderness of empty benches to which "Candida" and its early fellows used to be performed; (2) Mr. Granville Barker; (3) a slight cheapening of Mr. Shaw's own effects —such concessions to the weaker brethren as the "Take a phosphorus pill" and "She's hurt behind now"—as compared with the dry and exacting wit of such inventions as Candida's father; and (4) to set against this, a superiority in buoyancy and breadth of humorous observation in the character of Broadbent, who is the best modern attempt at a satiric figuring of English national character.

Larry Doyle is more dimly lined, perhaps because he is secretly viewed by Mr. Shaw more indulgently. For Mr. Shaw's insight is strictly the satirist's. Just as cathodic rays pass unobservantly through the flesh and bring out into clearness only the bone, so his observation is foggy and indefinite

where any qualities are to be dealt with but those on which satire fastens by its nature. Doyle, the Irishman, whose experience in England has spoilt him as a butt for Mr. Shaw's onslaught on the stay-at-homes, loses saliency in the same proportion in which he has thus lost absurdity. Keegan, too, the unfrocked soggarth, being conceived with an effort at tenderness, is conceived vaguely and almost weakly; while Father Dempsey, for whom Mr. Shaw has no quarter, is distinct as can be; so is Matthew Haffigan, a gnarled snag of a man, with the right harshness of the peasant not sentimentalized out of him, as is usual in books. Distinct, too, in a lesser degree, is Barney Doran, though here Mr. Shaw is a little less near to Irish life and a little nearer to its Boucicaultian counterfeit for the English stage. For the degrees of fidelity to Irish life in Mr. Shaw's Irish characters are curiously unequal. They are like the Irish accents of his interpreters in English theatres, which have ranged from the perfection of Mr. J. D. Beveridge, through the rather overdone "Irish comedian" brogue of Mr. Wilfred Shine (himself, no doubt, Irish) and the rougher imitations of Mr. Cremlin, down to the pure English of Mr. Harcourt Williams. So in the characters of Mat Haffigan and Father Dempsey Mr. Shaw is as piercingly veracious as J. M. Synge himself: in Barney Doran

the picture seems to have been caught on a retina itself just a little Londonized, while the picturesque *crétin*, Patsey Farrell, might have come out of the arch-falsifier, Charles Lever, himself.

For some months you could not see Mr. Shaw's squib of "Press Cuttings" without joining a bogus club. Our prudent law, sagaciously interpreted by Mr. Redford, is aware of the risk the State would run if a play with a Premier in it called Balsquith and a general called Mitchener could be seen by paying at the doors. So at first this peril was averted by making the audiences call themselves a "guild," and at last the safety of the country was permanently secured by rechristening Balsquith as "Johnson" and Mitchener as "Bones." Unchanged but for this formal softening of its nose, the dread torpedo may now be inspected at intervals without loss of the privilege of paying for one's seat. The little farce goes into one spacious act, half as long as all "Candida" or "The Devil's Disciple," and, like a French *revue*, it is all about "live issues"—that is, topics which will presently be dead, like the latest war-scare, suffragist and anti-suffragist excesses, conscription and the super-tax. Brief spasms of action open and close whole sessions of static talk, and nearly all the action and

the talk are good fun, though different from that of Mr. Shaw's first plays. Then he used to put ten times as much into dialogue as it would carry, or an audience take in. He does not waste wit in "Press Cuttings"; the ration is thinner and the make of drollery is often cheaper—a weak pun about underclothing, for instance, and worn things like "the weathercock which you, no doubt, call your mind"; and when this standard-bearer of innovation gives you the entertainment of hearing someone fall downstairs "off," and through a glass door at the bottom, you begin to wonder whether Solomon exaggerated the scarcity of thorough novelty. But the *effect* of wit upon an audience as a whole is probably fuller and more continuous than ever; the special kind of economy of means that is characteristic of the theatre is practised more skillfully.

Many deserving objects catch it from Mr. Shaw during the play's seventy-five minutes; indeed, at the first public performance, the whole of an audience, in which there were clearly several different strains of feeling about the topics raised, seemed to be equally and amply satisfied that the claws of derision were being stuck into the proper parties. One wonders how they all felt afterwards. Quite safe? Mr. Shaw's satire had never before been quite so much like an acid that eats, or could

eat, into anything equally well. From when he first wrote plays he could always spend hours in puncturing windbags, or taming stuffed lions, or clipping some whole bleating pen of sentimentalists, and yet send you away reflecting, not so much that blatancy and virilism and sentimentalism are grotesque things as that all vices and virtues alike are vulnerable things, possibly all of them mere variant forms of egoism. From "Press Cuttings" this aftertaste is stronger than ever; you see a windy little twopenny Bismarck hanged, drawn, and quartered by Mr. Shaw's wit, and you laugh for the moment and feel he deserves it, and then go away feeling, like the Quaker: "There, but for the grace of God, or something more fortuitous, go courage and honour and clear thinking." Satire is often inspiriting, but Mr. Shaw's satire grows, on the whole, more discouraging; its obverse side seems less and less to imply a reverse side of animating enthusiasm; rather, it makes you suspect that if your perceptions were better equipped you might find that your strongest beliefs are half humbug; that, as the well-born youth in "Major Barbara" says of the Salvation Army, there is a certain amount of tosh about the ultimate objects of common human respect, "most friendship mere feigning, most loving mere folly," etc. You thought you had a corrosive test for bad

money, and then you find that it bites almost as well into gold.

Another trick that seems to grow on Mr. Shaw is that tormented unreticence of the very pure which sometimes rivals in unloveliness the licence of the enemy. One would not have incompetent mandarins like the present Censor of Plays meddle with anybody's work, but Mr. Shaw ought to have scored out several sentences in this play himself. They are simply bad workmanship, only explicable by a fit of that craving to make people stare which sometimes appears to the craving person as independence, but is really parasitism, the impulse to conform and the impulse to shock being both, in their extremes, forms of dependence on other people—on their approval or their censure.

Mr. Shaw's is one of the cyclonic kind of talents that charge through their time as an express train tears through country stations, and if your mind be only a piece of straw or an empty paper-bag, or is not pulled in any special direction by something else, it leaves all and follows the express until the express drops it a little farther on. To feel themselves thus dropped is a common experience among the many people who at one time or another have thought they had found an intellectual leader in

Mr. Shaw. Some, in their vexation, have thought themselves almost betrayed. They have thought they had derived some body of principles from Mr. Shaw's writings, and then, on the arising of an obvious test case for their application in politics or some other sphere of practice, they have found Mr. Shaw derisively and triumphantly positive on what seems to them the side against which he had morally enlisted himself as well as them; and they are left rueful and gravelled, with nothing to say to his fine new arguments but Dogberry's resentful note: "A marvellous witty fellow, I assure you." No doubt this is unfair to Mr. Shaw. And yet such unfairness is intelligible where the victim has an old habit of giving out whatever he thinks at the time, or has just read with interest, as truth so final that failure to accept it can only be one or another kind of deformity in the person failing. The common difficulty in finding a continuous and coherent philosophy or comment on life in Mr. Shaw's writings is justly traced by Mr. Chesterton to the combination of this lifelong positiveness and finality of assertion with a lifelong capacity for growth and change of view. He has been at different times a believer and a disbeliever in the greatness and value of human progress in historic times. Starting with a lively contempt for the old-fashioned romance of love and marriage, he has

worked round, in "Man and Superman," to an ideal of sexual attraction and selection which is really little but what all the story-tellers have given us from Haroun al-Raschid's time onwards. Between some of his earlier and some of his later plays there are, besides, such incompatibilities as are prone to come when a man who has gained fame by running pins into other people's noxious bubbles finds that the time has arrived for him to try to blow a salutary counter-bubble of his own. One may suppose with a little exaggeration, that in "Man and Superman" its author was striving to be no longer a mere scourge to slugs and caterpillars; he now tried to grow something, to raise a plant of his own, and a very natural result was a novel air of vulnerability and of reluctant or playfully impudent inability to stand by much that he had said in his more purely castigatory days. An attempt at constructive philosophizing is a pretty ordeal for one who has done much as keeper of the stocks and pillory for errant thinkers.

One ingredient in Mr. Shaw, long ago noted by Mr. Yeats, another Irishman, is not often taken into account by Englishmen fully enough. This is pure mischief, not a mania for destruction, but a frequent and irresistible impulse to "gammon the flats" for the joy of the thing. In an Englishman as much possessed with what Matthew Arnold

called excellent seriousness as Mr. Shaw, a surrender to such impulses is rare. It is a much commoner recreation of the Irish spirit, and long may Mr. Shaw continue to enjoy it as he did in those days when his name, now an asset on posters, used to scatter playgoers before it. Long kept out of his own, at last he came into it with a rush. Three of his plays have been acted in London together; a King has gone to see one of them; the "Edinburgh Review" has weighed his whole dramatic output and not found it underweight; at theatres we have "Shaw seasons" as if he were Italian opera. To those who heralded him to the full stretch of their lungs when he was hardly ever played except in Germany and the United States, the change is half delightful, half alarming. There is the joy of having told you so; there is the fear, for Mr. Shaw, of the woe due unto them of whom all men speak well. Can Mr. Shaw, when thus come into his kingdom, keep his fine way of doing violence to all the massed stupidities that thrive in kingdoms? Can he keep his seriousness as well in check as ever, and not let the second-rate sage and seer in him wring the neck of the first-rate collaborating "limb," or Jackeen, the real imp of genius, all keen, cruel retina and shameless, cutting tongue, who sometimes runs away with

him to such good purpose—in the last act, for instance, of "The Devil's Disciple," which can always keep the audience in a roar? Let us hope for the best, as one of Mr. Shaw's victims might say.

"On the Actual Spot"

MERELY to walk about the ground before the pageant at York in 1909 was to come into stirring and effortless contact with plenty of history. You went in past a tower the Romans built under Severus; from the grand stand your eye caught a church that was founded by Siward, who put down Macbeth; the scene was shut in at the back by the wall of an abbey whence Fountains itself was an offshoot. The lawn where they played sloped down on the left to the Ouse, and your eye set your mind travelling up and down stream, along the level Vale of York, southward to where that natural pathway is carried on up the broad Vale of Trent until it debouches on flat Southern England, and northward to where it leads easily out, between the flanking Pennine and the Yorkshire Wolds, to the sill of flat coast that in roadless times opened a way, round hilly Durham and Northumberland, to Scotland. What a place for a city! A bridge crossed the river in sight; it, too, offered to tell about York's being one of the

puissant company of ancient inland seaports — Chester, Bristol, Lincoln, Norwich, Canterbury, Rochester, London, Exeter, Gloucester — the "bridge places" or first-bridge towns at the head of tidal navigations in a time of small sea-craft. On such a site history is sensuous. York, you see with your eyes, must always have counted, as surely as Constantinople, unless you go back to some date when reddish waves were licking all round the southern base of the Peak and laying down the soft red sand with which the men of York and Chester were to build.

As you sat in the stand, replete with these pleasing reflections and ravished to find the receipt of ideas so painless, there entered the first players, a Neolithic household and their friends, who quarrelled, made it up, prayed and loved till the Bronze Age, embodied in picturesque strangers, came in and, after some words, intermarried with the natives, round-skull with long-skull, for the eventual production of the reasonably modelled skulls now exhibited by the citizens of York. It was all most earnestly done; it was done by Mr. Louis Parker, far the best pageant-maker then in practice. And yet, strangely, what people would call the appropriateness of the scene actually kept one's mind from attending. There were the Neolithic family and the adventitious Trojans, doing the

right thing with all their souls, and after them the Romans and the Angles and everybody in his season, and there at the bottom of the lawn was the bed of the valley up which, in good earnest, Neolithic man had chased Palæolithic man into the poorer soils of North Britain, and Brythons had propelled Picts into Galloway, and Angles at the proper time had pushed Brythons up into Strathclyde, as naturally as the Great North Road has flowed along the same course, and the Great Northern Railway after it. And yet the standing topographic pageant did not help out the momentary dramatic one, but hindered it and rivalled it. There was any amount of archæological care and competence in the dresses, the weapons, and, as far as might be, in the action; there were lines with music and force in them, written by Mr. James Rhoades. But somehow it was like acting now a Plantagenet's coronation in Westminster Abbey. Acting is one mighty stimulant to imagination, and the presence of the scene of great and ancient events is another; but you cannot just add the one to the other and enjoy at once the sum of both, perhaps because some attributes inseparable from the acting take repose away from those other objects, and some attributes commonly found in those objects make acting look flimsy and cheap, though it is not.

It was the same with the later scenes—admirably chosen as they were, and rightly and richly equipped, and acted with spirit. Severus's own many-angled tower near the pageant-ground was too much for Severus in tinsel and wig. St. Mary's Abbey's own wall took all the illusion out of St. Mary's monks when they mutinied and "ragged" in the veritable precinct. At least one of us recalled another baulking of hope, ten years earlier, when Mr. F. R. Benson and his comrades played the surrender scenes of "Richard II." in that very Flint Castle where Richard had fallen into Bolingbroke's hands five hundred years, to a day, before. The Castle, now a mere ring of stumps of towers, stands on a little promontory jutting into the estuary of the Dee. The stumps enclose a green courtyard, roughly round. As you enter this courtyard the eye leaves behind it the squat, smudgy town, blighted with chemical works; to right and left it sees only stretches of wet sand and bleached grass, with sea-birds moving over them; in front it looks across water and sand, then shimmering and blinking in August heat, to the low hills of the Wirral. Planted on this background there stood out the least wrecked of the towers, a ruin some thirty feet high, many of its stones eaten away almost to the texture of a honeycomb or a sponge, its upper edge tattered with decay and

overgrown with grass and wild flowers. Stage scenery was hung or leant against this tower; a rough stage was built in front of it; once or twice it was brought into use as part of the scenery itself, as where Richard from the Castle walls parleys with Northumberland before descending to the "base court." Some of us had hoped to unite for a few hours the characteristic pleasures of the playhouse to the pleasure kindled by the sight of places and buildings that played great parts long ago. Might not those surroundings attune one's mind, in some new and more effectual way, to the theme and the poetry?

It was a failure. Theatrical illusion, whatever it is, fell down dead in that open air which the voice could not fill, and amidst that circle of almost derisive realities. And the realities suffered loss too. The old eaten stones and the tinny stage armour, the rouge and the sunlight, the sound of the metre and the sounds of the sea-birds flying and crying over the sands, debased and insulted each other, until you felt that you never had known how much could be said both against acting and against keeping unburied the bones of dead buildings. The sensation revived on seeing Constantine the Great and Caracalla, Harold and Edwin and half the Plantagenets disport themselves, in a guise which really postulated footlights, among the stones

of Roman and Norman York. Perhaps the right way to give a pageant, if at all, is in a clear space surrounded by an enormous paling and emptied of every "property" tainted with the fatal attribute of non-theatricality. For as surely as anything non-theatrical intrudes it will make everything that is rightly theatrical look wrongly theatrical, or "stagy," and it may look, itself, like a mummy in a green-room.

There is a further difficulty, a deeper incompatibility between the two pleasures that these performances are meant to blend. At Flint the stones that Richard II. may have trodden, the sands along which Bolingbroke marched from Chester "with great joy and satisfaction" these, by themselves, set your fancy to work; they delight you; they earn an importance. And yet at the touch of the great play acted before them, they seemed not to gain, but lose, moment; their interest dwindled. For, the more the play's passion takes you up into itself, the more do you find that the mere fact that Richard surrendered at Flint, and not at Pomfret or Conway, does not matter at all. By writing "Richard II." Shakspere did in one sense render the event of August 21, 1399, more memorable; but in another he rendered it less so; less memorable for that it happened where it did and when it did, more memorable for what it meant of tempest

and revolution in men's spirits. In ascending from the rather simple, elementary range of interest in events, as fixed by certain dates or places, to the range of interest in their moral causes, he somehow inflicts on the former a kind of atrophy, a relative belittlement. What, you come to feel, have you to do with local ruins and chronology, when such a rushing tide of emotion is there to carry you along? They become irrelevant, almost impertinent, with their little appeal, so pleasant and good at other times, to the amateur archæologist within us.

Three Acted Plays of Molière

IF we were serious, like the French, and heard that "L'Avare" was coming our way, no doubt we should go into training as they do, or did some time since, when one of the bigger French classics was down to be played at the Odéon. For an hour before it began we should have a person of pleasing delivery, charged with relevant "tips," to hold us entranced in some adjacent building with talk of the place of "L'Avare" in the works of Molière, in French drama, in literature as a whole—where it comes in dramatic geology, being a sort of Mesozoic "rock"; how it stands to those Primary rocks, the Italian Comedies of Art, and to Archæan schists like Plautus, and so right back to the Fundamental Gneiss of Attic Comedy; and, again, to later rocks, from Cretaceous deposits like Fielding's cribbed "Miser," to mere recent London Clays like Mr. Mortimer's "My Artful Valet"; all of which learning, as Grumio says, now dies in

oblivion and we return inexperienced to our graves. Or, again, we should hear how the play did not prosper first, the public—singular public—thinking that all comedy should be in verse; but how its fame, when once it did take, went up and up, *ad infinitum*, like Coleridge's moon, till Goethe said that the play was pre-eminently great, sublimely tragic, and Mr. Arthur Symons called it the most Shaksperean of Molière's comedies. Or, yet again, we might learn how this scene or that comes straight out of the "Aulularia," and something else from Boisrobert's "La Belle Plaideuse," as was the simple custom of the golden age of literary spulzie and depredation; and how in the list of dishes for Harpagon's party, at first not made out by the author, but left to be gagged at the actor's discretion, you see a last trace, in Molière, of the old Renaissance comedy of improvisation; and how, when Harpagon says of La Flèche, "Je ne me plais point à voir ce chien de boiteux là," it was only because La Flèche had to be acted by Molière's wife's brother, Béjart, who had to limp, whether La Flèche did or not, having damaged a foot in stopping a fight; for when an actor cannot act a part, the part may still act him, as Hamlet, they say, acted Burbage in the "fat and scant of breath" scene, Burbage being then a little pursy, as became one who should die

of apoplexy fairly young. Then, five minutes before the curtain rose, we should all fling precipitately out of the lecture-room, distended with information, and run *ventre-à-terre* to the theatre, as Captain Cuttle, "after taking a glass of warm rum and water at a tavern close by, to collect his thoughts," rushed at full speed across the court to interview Mr. Carter before the benefits of the precaution should evaporate. But we are not serious like the French.

Still, our practice has at least the qualities of its defects. Seeing Molière done by a fit French company in an English theatre, with the virgin ignorance of our minds unshadowed by even that semi devotional "will to believe" which strains to find a masterpiece where authority has proclaimed one, perhaps we can come nearer to a "first night on any stage" view of the play than is possible now for any educated Frenchman. And is there an educated Frenchman who, if he could see "L'Avare" for the first time to-day, and had never heard it classed, as academic people usually class it, among Molière's greatest things, would not pronounce it at once a second-rate Molière, a thing conceived by an imagination working only at half-pressure? The whole play is Harpagon; but Harpagon is a character only half made; not a man but an inventory of traits—bricks that are still

only bricks, not a house. His avarice is not painted, only scheduled, like Olivia's beauty—"item, two lips indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth." No doubt the taking of such notes does often go to the making of one of the great types of character in literature. But, to convert enumeration into creation, there must also come something like the electric current which, as we understand, sometimes turns the mechanical juxtaposition of two elements into a new substance.

These types come of the conception, with tremendous energy and delight, of the whole impact of a certain character, and of the body it animates, upon both the senses and the thoughts of a spectator. In Falstaff or Sancho Panza the whole man, his soul, his shape, his walk, his voice, are fused as indissolubly as matter and manner are in music; not merely do they imply one another; they *are* one another, as the rhythm of a good lyric *is* its meaning and not merely something wedded to its meaning or interpreting it. When Molière had for some time been thinking out the qualities of his M. Jourdain as so many intellectual essences, so many abstract states of mind, there surely came some moment when M. Jourdain got on his legs and walked, and thenceforward had not to be inferred or evolved, but merely followed and

listened to. Harpagon never reaches that stage. He goes on being built up feature by feature, amassed accretively, and the divine accident never happens ; there comes no point at which you feel that henceforth Harpagon is making Molière rather than Molière making Harpagon, as you feel in "Henry IV." that Shakspere has let a djinn out of the pot and must do as it tells him. The miser never has that touch of plausible fantasy which intense personal life, intensely imagined, carries with it, attesting its difference from such abstract types of personality as may be deduced from statistics or from scientific observation of misers in general, or of hard fathers in general, mere summaries of averages, tendencies, "curves," from which the averaging process has eliminated just the differentiating grain, perhaps, of individual unreason, which makes the individual surprising and exciting. It feels pert to speak so of Molière, but how could a playgoer rightly value M. Jourdain, or Alceste, or Célimène if he classed them with this Harpagon?

Then, what a plot—for Molière! Think of one of his triumphs of first-act lucidity—of the "Médecin Malgré Lui," shall we say, where every speech is worth its place for its drollness alone, or for its expressiveness of character alone, and yet also helps to tell you why every one is where he is,

and what the whole game is to be. You think of such things ruefully while hearing Élise and Valère in "L'Avare" struggling to coach the audience in their previous history. Where else does Molière give unfortunate actors such speeches as this?

"Je me représente à toute heure ce péril étonnant qui commença de nous offrir aux regards l'un de l'autre; cette générosité surprenante qui vous fit risquer votre vie, pour dérober la mienne à la fureur des ondes; ces soins pleins de tendresse que vous me fîtes éclater après m'avoir tirée de l'eau, et les hommages assidus de cet ardent amour que ni le temps ni les difficultés n'ont rebuté, et qui, vous faisant négliger et parents et patrie, arrête vos pas en ces lieux, y tient en ma faveur votre fortune déguisée, et vous a réduit, pour me voir, à vous revêtir de l'emploi de domestique de mon père."

The thing is piled up like some Victorian candelabrum—four main branches, the top one with five lights of its own, and the whole erection hung about with lustres—artifice itself, a very measure of the distance of some kinds of writing from the spoken word. Actresses battle through it stoutly, but it is not human speech. And then the finish, with its heaped marvels of coincidence and its three endless speeches of narrative, all to get one curtain down. Molière must have felt

that these infinite yarns would not do—that people would yawn; so, when he played Harpagon he had, it is thought, a piece of "business" here to help them past the tedium. He had two lighted candles on the table, and, as the narratives drew out, Harpagon would frugally blow out one; Maître Jacques would re-light it for Harpagon's torment; again it was blown out and again re-lit, till Harpagon, to make sure, put it in his pocket, and Jacques re-lit it there. So people laughed, and the weak spot was passed, as a conjuror lifts you past a trick's thin place with a burst of patter. And the French theatrical tradition, unlike our own, is so strong and unbroken, that to this day every French company playing "L'Avare" goes faithfully through with this piece of business, and all of us watch it and laugh, and do not hear the *dénouement*—all as Molière intended. But Molière, when most himself, has no need to prevent you from hearing his words.

After "L'Avare," see "Le Misanthrope" pretty well acted. It is a new world. But who, at this time of day, shall discourse on the "Misanthrope"? That were like rising to say a few words about "Hamlet." Read our own Meredith on it. He gives all you want to measure the "Misanthrope's" fineness; or, rather, he shows you its use as a tape to measure your brains with. Does

it all seem idle talk to you, froth for froth's sake, or the crackling of thorns under a pot, whereas life is real, life is earnest, and so on? Then your complaint will be, probably, Puritan's cramp. Or does the wit seem to want body? Ought it to rollick and hiccup and leer, like some jolly good farce that you know of? Your trouble must be Bacchanalian's necrosis; your intellect's palate is numb. Or does the play strike you as rather too harsh? Is Célimène herself metallic? Should hers be a soft, clinging, "womanly" nature, highly collapsible late in last acts? Then the thing that is wrong with your brain is Sentimentalist's softening. Unless you can delight, with a whole heart, in Célimène's great duel with Alceste, unless you ask, for the moment, nothing more of her than a little world of manner afire with animation and enjoyment, and the witchery of a demonic, ungovernable wit: unless she only sets you hunting delightedly for images to figure her—tall ships in full sail, or winds leaping about where they list, or polygonal jewels capriciously flashing, now this way, now that—then comedy, quintessential comedy, with its ungushing humaneness and radiant sanity, is not for you.

There is a special quality of pleasure to be had from any performance of Molière by competent

actors soaked, as competent French actors usually are, in the main stream of French histrionic tradition. You have a sensation like that of turning over a portfolio of old and choice theatrical prints; every figure stands, at each moment, on the exact spot which Molière's own coaching first, and then two hundred and fifty years of continuous, intelligent consideration, have determined to be the right one. The stage always offers you a real picture, in the painter's sense; it is composed; and the composition has usually a savoursome severity—if there is a sofa, it is for some one to faint upon presently; if there is a table, it is for a notary to draw up a deed. The rest is space, and it has to be stood in and acted in; no pretty dodging among tea-tables and whatnots, no evasive fiddling with paper-knives and cigar-cases; every one must "take the floor," in the fullest sense, and make himself count for all that he should in the picture. Then, in Molière, any well-schooled actor has at command a golden treasure of perfected "business" that has grown on to parts like Scapin and Géronte. You are constantly given the fruit, in some tone or gesture, some happy abruptness or droll incongruity, of two and a half centuries of the brooding of fine comedians over the possibilities of a part. Take the case of "Les Fourberies de Scapin." At the end of the second act Scapin,

you remember, has just jockeyed the two "heavy fathers" out of a large sum apiece, to give to the two scamps, the not very criminous scamps, their sons. Just as the curtain falls the sons are about to go out of the room before the servant, but the actor of Scapin usually draws himself up with a regal air, waves them back, says, "Après moi, messieurs! Après moi! Honneur à la fourberie!" or, "Derrière, messieurs! Derrière! Honneur à la fourberie!" and swaggers out before them.

You will find no word of this in your printed text of Molière. And yet there is this to be said for the journeyman actor who does it to-day—that Coquelin *cadet* did it before him, and that Coquelin *cadet* learnt it from Coquelin *aîné*, and Coquelin *aîné* had it from Régnier, which carries it back far towards the beginning of the nineteenth century. Régnier in youth took over the living tradition of the way to play Scapin from Samson, then acting still, and Samson, in turn, had seen Préville play it, who acted during the greater part of the eighteenth century, and must have been familiar with the way the part was taken by the successive generations of the mighty acting family of La Thorillière, a dynasty whose founder joined Molière's company in 1662 and certainly saw how Molière himself played Scapin, for La Thorillière was playing the second valet, Silvestre, on

the first night of "Les Fourberies" in 1671. Though there is, so far as we know, no positive evidence, there is a traditional belief that the business of the passage goes right back—as this pedigree of oral tradition clearly makes possible—to Molière himself, and that at some time not long after Molière's death, if not at his suggestion, the humour of the scene was crystallized into the amusing piece of gag that we hear to-day. And the whole character, you feel, has been slowly built up, cell on cell, in the brains of Molière, the Thorillières, Préville, Samson, Régnier, the Coquelins, and many others, each comic genius adding his stroke of communicable invention like a stone to a cairn.

People often talk of an actor's personal art as if it died wholly with the artist, but in a sense we see Garrick and Siddons every year and can taste the humour of Munden and Suett in the splendid deposits of their own genius that great actors add to the amassed traditions of the great parts. Only, in England, theatrical history has not the fullness and continuity that gives to everything on the French stage its ordered genealogy. Who can tell, with any confidence, the source or date of most of the established business of our acting of Shakspere? How far, if at all, beyond Irving can we trace the silent return of Shylock to his empty

house, after Jessica's flight? When was Launcelot Gobbo's silent bowing scene with the four gallants invented? Who devised the elaborate business of Peter and the Nurse, with the fan, in "Romeo and Juliet"? For all we know, some of these pieces of by-play or dumb-show may be of Shakspere's own conception, taught by him to the actors, and preserved by oral descent during three centuries. But the long closing of the theatres by the Puritans in the seventeenth century must have been calamitous to oral tradition. Perhaps we owe it to that crime that in seeing Molière acted, rather than in seeing Shakspere, our minds become restfully aware of the savour of an art ripe-brown and mellow.

Improvements in Play-making

"NO," R. L. Stevenson said, "I will not write a play for Irving, nor for the devil. Can you not see that the work of *falsification* which a play demands is of all tasks the most ungrateful?" And Zola said a dramatist was one who "conceives subjects in a particular fashion outside the truth." That is a novelist's natural feeling. In trying to write a play he may feel like an eager student tied to a "degree course." He has to give up valued liberties. He must forgo much motion for his characters—the directly presented motion of the pursuit, the mountain-walk, the railway-journey, bear-hunts and flights through the heather. To economize changes of scene he may have to make persons appear at times and in places that, were he more free, he would not have chosen. His canvas cramps him: he must do in twenty thousand words what, in a novel, he might do in four or five times as many without seeming long. Again he is dogged by a new demand for a

sustained super-lucidity; no aiming now at the single, absorbed, undisturbed, picked reader, who can take in almost anything, and, if he loses hold for a moment, can turn back a page or two; all, the artist now feels, may be lost if a single point of explanation fail to pierce the average brain of an average crowd, in which every unit is partly minding the others and partly the play. The novelist finds that on this new ground he is hampered in practising the characteristic refinements of his proper art: and so he is apt to ban the stage as a place of coarsened effects and blunted points, where a crude glare of explicitness allows no shadows or half-lights, and where no one can come, go, or talk like a man of this world, but must always be acting as friend of the author, putting himself "out of drawing" that somebody else may be safely got "on" or got "off," or that this thing or that may be duly explained at the start to the audience. To the novelist's eye it may seem a mere system of unveracities beaten upon by a tropical sun.

No artist looks at his own art's conventions like that. They enliven and brace him. And yet, among dramatists proper, there are degrees of remoteness from Stevenson's view, degrees corresponding to a more general distinction between two tempers in craftsmen. For in every craft you

will find some practitioners who seem to be always fighting down the resistance of their medium, crushing its intractability, and driving its special difficulties out of sight; and you will find others who seem to hug these very terms of bondage, parade them, salute them, play round them. When you see M. Rostand acted you feel he is one with the poets who crib and cabin themselves by choice in rondels and triolets; he is like those designers whose joy it is to have some queer-shaped space to fill on a convex surface. See how, in "Les Romanesques," he deals with a dramatist's earliest difficulty—that of telling his audience who every one is and just how things stand. Or, rather, first see how, say in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," Sir Arthur Pinero racks his brain to overcome and to hide that difficulty, and then see how M. Rostand embraces it, beaming. His two "heavy fathers," zestfully "heavy," stand over against one another, exchanging the most naively superfluous information—superfluous as between themselves; their gay ingenuous-seeming want of plausibility reminds you of the coquetry with which designers, painting teapots, sometimes turn to fashion and to prettiness the obstacles put in their way by the spout and handle.

We would do well to let our pleasures help each

other out, one setting off another; we take sides too much: we pit one joy against others when we should be trying for flavoursome contrasts, taking a good look at Rembrandt's old women and then one at Watteau's jimp ladies of quality, or going straight from the enjoyment of a Chelsea or Chantilly statuette, all modish grace and unreality, to that of Michelangelo's "Lorenzo" or Rodin's "Penseur." An art like M. Rostand's is both good itself, in its own flavour, and better as a whet before your meals on mightier substances. Those very kittle cattle, rhyming heroic couplets, he not merely drives with ease, but makes them frisk and sport ostentatiously, like tame kids, doing prodigies of suppleness by the way, throwing somersaults and jumping through hoops, demurely self-conscious. He gives you scented artifice in dialogue, the scents quite good; he has a flattering, intimate preciosity of diction which seems to co-opt the playgoer into a rather choice set of co-heirs of French literary and theatrical tradition and co-possessors of an elegant bookishness; his verbal porcelain has the right mannered daintiness, the gaiety and freedom within the enjoyed limits of a mode, the smooth glaze or gloss of literary finish over it all, a kind of "tightness," as painters say, and also a kind of porcelain fragility. Each speech and scene, and perhaps a whole play, will depend

for their point on some turn of phrase or play of coincidence so quick and frail that the whole thing seems as if, were it mishandled one moment in the acting, it might fall and break like a carried vase.

That is one way of taking the medium and rules of your craft as you find them. The other is nearer akin to the old idea of art—say, the writer's art—as a combat in which the thought has to fight down words like a kind of evil, words being that which thought can no more do without than the soul can do without the body, but also, as the body to the soul, a thing which seems to keep thought from being all that it might be, tying it down to a dullness and weakness that can be made less by hard trying, but not quite got rid of. In fine work by men who lean to this view each convention they use will seem to us the lean survivor of a struggle to do without it; to win its place each has gone through the eye of the needle. And by modern dramatists this view is leant to the more.

To see what is meant by fighting a craft's conventions down in this sense, compare a typical English play of about half a century ago with a corresponding play of to-day. In 1864 T. W. Robertson's "David Garrick" was commonly regarded as one of the latest and finest things in English dramatic craftsmanship. But Robertson,

ike every dramatist—so far as we know—of his time, could only walk with two crutches, the soliloquy unlimited and the vociferous "aside." He begins "David Garrick" by posting Ada and her father on two chairs, beside two tables, to right and left of the stage, the one reading a book, the other writing a letter. Both begin to speak "aside." The one reads her book aloud, the other reads his letter aloud. Then both make remarks aloud to themselves, one of them about the other, the other about a third person. In both cases the remarks are precisely those which each would, in nature, have most carefully refrained from making within hearing of the other. And so it goes on when Garrick comes in. His conversation is interlarded with long and passionate intervals of "aside"; sometimes they are delivered with the eyes and ears of one or more persons fixed on him, and yet the audience is to assume that they are heard only by itself.

Now, Robertson did not, like M. Rostand, do all this for fun, with half-ironic pleasure in a fantasy of artifice. He did it because he knew no way of coming closer to nature under the hard conditions of theatrical representation. He would have thought that it passed the wit of man to reduce lower the concessions of a play to the convention of the occasional mutual inaudibleness of

persons together on a stage. Give up my "asides," he would have said, and how am I to tell the audience that which it is necessary for them to know in order that they may see the point of what comes next? If a gentleman, on being presented to a lady, is not to stagger back three paces, clutch at his heart, and shout, "It is she whom I have so long adored unknown"—all this unperceived by the lady and others present on the stage—how is the audience to appreciate his suppressed emotion during the rest of the scene?

For many more years this reasoning was felt to be cogent. Our theatres continued to echo with stentorian asides. Then Ibsen came to scandalize theatrical Europe with plays in which nobody spoke "aside" and hardly anyone soliloquized—or, if anyone did, it was only where in life a person of his special temper was likely to do so. Such plays ought, by the standards then current, to have been unactable. Yet they were acted; they got on quite well; like Columbus's egg, they stood up at their ease, defying authority. Then, almost suddenly, opposition gave in. The thing was like Bach's trick of playing on the keyboard with his thumb, where all the world had played without. No one had thought—effectually thought—of doing it till Bach did. After him nobody thought of doing anything else. And so, in the English plays

written since Ibsen appeared, you see the soliloquy and the "aside" steadily and swiftly atrophying. It has been evolution at full gallop. Man has taken some millions of years to relinquish his gills; even now he yawns, which is said to betray an old habit of using them. But Sir Arthur Pinero shed his dramatic gills in less than twenty years. In youth he made plain men soliloquize like Hamlets, and discourse aside like Congreve's Double Dealer; by 1900 the soliloquy and the "aside," the stays and bread winners of mid-Victorian dramatists, were almost extinct in his work; he had himself helped Ibsen and Sudermann to change us playgoers so much that we had learnt to smile when people on a stage would stand three feet apart, hallooing their several secrets *urbi et orbi*, without the least fear of being heard by each other.

In that case, however, the change has been specially rapid. As a rule the stage moves slowly; if you watch it during a short time and compare it with the general movement of the human genius in other arts, you are liable to invasion by panic; has its conservatism, you may wonder, passed into positive petrifaction at last? Yet you can prove that it moves. If you take even quite a long look at a glacier you will not observe it to flow, but who shall stand against the evidence of shirt-studs and

coins carried down in forty years from the head to the foot of Mont Blanc? With some such amazement as these marvels cause may the playgoer look at Meilhac and Halévy's "Frou-Frou," a typical play of 1869, and then at M. Capus's "La Châtelaine," a typical play of 1902, and see that in less than forty years the theatre has moved clean out of its old position of dependence upon the volubility of lady's-maids, the gifted timeliness of postmen, and the abrogation of all existing social custom as often as A must be got into the same room as B or the play perish. Better still, go to "La Châtelaine" first, and then to "Frou-Frou." If you do you will say to yourself, "So these were the hands that we used to be bluffed with." Deserted husbands call in person to hand back dowries in specie to errant wives—there was neither East nor West, post-office nor banker nor solicitor, when two strong men, or a strong man and a weak woman, were wanted to stand face to face and have it out in the Dumasian and paulo-post-Dumasian theatre. Penitent wives looked in at their deserted husbands' just in the nick of time to die in state on the drawing room sofa, fortified by the last rites of the old Dumasian ethics.

Anyone, it is said, can govern in a state of siege. Anyone, you begin to feel, could make a play if he might, like Meilhac and Halévy, declare a kind of

martial law first and suspend all the ordinary rules and usages of human intercourse. M. Capus disdains such advantages. He starts from scratch. Nearly every person in "La Châtelaine" comes in and goes out just at a time when in life it would be rather odd if he did not. M. Capus does not, like Sir Arthur Pinero in his middle period, send hosts to write letters in corners "up stage" in the middle of a dinner-party, in order that their guests may deliver biographies of them down at the footlights. The easy and slipping movement of "La Châtelaine" makes play-writing look as if anyone could do it in his evenings. Of course the look misleads. The technical task is diabolically hard, like writing sonnets. What has happened is not that the modern has escaped from the jurisdiction of the laws of theatrical necessity; they are as Median and Persian as ever; but that he has worked his play clear of the traces of the effort to conform to them; his conformity is more considered and subtle, so that it leaves him more of liberty in essentials while it also satisfies with more nicety the essential needs of theatrical circumstance. When Meilhac and Halévy wanted A to meet B they smashed a way through all intervening improbabilities; they forced a meeting. When M. Capus wants the same thing he makes a much wider cast among the possibilities of life until he

finds the one which would make such a meeting natural. The thing, when done, seems simple; but, in truth, it comes of far more exhaustive search and toil than the other; having the air of a short cut, it really shows how much more completely the author has gone round the whole of the ground.

Again, you might trace growth in the theatre's dealing with "action." It had long been a commonplace that action in some form was of the essence of drama, when Professor C. E. Vaughan came out to argue with much force that since the first of the great Greeks tragedy had been turning more and more from "the presentation of action" to "the presentation of character," and "from the outworks of character, those aspects of it which stand in the closest connection with action and issue most immediately in action, to its inmost citadel, to those regions where it withdraws most completely within itself." One is tempted to try to re-state the case with a difference. Action, one may feel, is still of the essence; even if "things happen" less in the best of our plays than in "Richard III.," the characters' minds must be all in a stir and must still be changing their relative places. The general line of advance may perhaps be roughly described as away from physical action and towards psychological action.

Of course the two are almost always entangled, each implying the other. And yet if you think of the bustle of marching and bloodshed in "Macbeth" or "Coriolanus" and then of the most modern-spirited tragedies, like "Pelléas et Mélisande" in one kind and "The Master Builder" in another, you do beyond doubt feel a contrast. In these last the pace of the spiritual action is tremendous: and it is genuine action—spiritual defeats and victories, advances, retreats, coalitions, separations, and not mere static intensity of mood, as in non-dramatic presentations of emotional states, like Tennyson's "Lotus-Eaters." But there has also been a liberation from the drama's old dependence on salient forms of external action. It is true that the degree of such dependence has fluctuated much throughout the theatre's known history. The Elizabethans in England, and Calderon and Lope de Vega in Spain, increased and diversified the external action of drama as it was known to the Greeks. Hugo, again, in "Hernani," made the external action richer and more exciting than Racine had made it in "Phèdre." Many times in the growth of the theatre some dramatist of the first rank has seemed to cast back instinctively towards the robust melodramatic structure of primitive tragedy. The tide has ebbed and flowed, but on the whole the

river has carried the drama away from interest in the more physical or spatial action and towards interest in the molecular action within the heart and mind.

You might verify this drift, as between two great earlier periods of the theatre, by comparing the kings in Greek plays and in Shakspere. There is plenty of action of some kind in both these dramatizations of the idea of kingship. But then the dominant interest of the regular Kreon of Greek tragedy is dynamic; he is the banisher, the executioner, the giver in marriage, a force positive, almost mechanical, driving the plots of plays forward; whereas the typical king in Shakspere's plays of English history has become, for his chief interest, an ordinary human soul driven from pillar to post by the adventures of a strange calling. In quite modern tragedy the minimum of external action is approached by Maeterlinck's "Intérieur," the emotional action of which is volcanic; and the probable line of future change is indicated in the well-known passage from his "Trésor des Humbles":

"I have come to believe that an old man sitting in his arm-chair, waiting patiently with his lamp beside him, giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting,

without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny—I have come to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or the husband who avenges his honour."

We are not to expect any regular and complete atrophy of external action: no doubt it will fluctuate still, each periodical romantic impulse sending it up with a rush, while each anti-romantic reaction will lower its pulse for a corresponding period. But, taking one time with another, the relative value of striking bodily action dwindles, and that of the soul's action, so far as this can be figured apart, absorbs dramatists more.

Now for another example of modern dealing with ancient rule or convention. Half a century ago it was a rigid rule with the French—then rulers of the European theatre—that dramatists must not have secrets from their audience. Their doctrine, worked out from Voltaire's time to Scribe's, was that the playgoer's eye must be all seeing; that the pleasure of suspense and expectation about a plot is essentially non-theatrical; that the essentially

theatrical interest is that of seeing how various degrees of ignorance—of things which the spectator knows—will cause the several persons in a play to act. It was the Greek theory of play-making too. Sophocles, in the "Œdipus Tyrannus," takes pains to make clear from the first that the hero is going to marry his mother. Sophocles only invites you to be interested in the hero's states of mind as he comes by degrees to know this truth, which everybody in the auditorium knew before. Scribe's most ingenious feats were scenes in which several people on the stage and in rooms just off it were mentally separated from each other by various degrees and qualities of ignorance of some common body of facts affecting them all, and thoroughly understood by every spectator. The climax of "Le Monde où l'on s'ennuie" is a later masterpiece of play on this agreeable sensation of being wholly "in it," as against a group of characters who are diversely and drolly kept out of it until we see what they will do.

It is true that there had been attempts, between the Periclean Age and the Victorian, to break with this convention. Voltaire made a famous attempt when he found fault with Sophocles himself for giving away at the start the whole secret on the unravelment of which the audience ought, Voltaire believed, to have hung intent and uncertain. But

that, said the men of tradition, was all that Voltaire knew. They plumed themselves on superior insight into the psychology of play-going, and the threatened convention was once more barred up and patrolled, until, during Sarcey's reign, the whole critical watch would turn out with their lanterns and staves to put down a play in which the least thing was kept back—flat burglary, Sarcey explained, as ever was committed.

This seemed the last word on the technics of drama until the barbarians from Scandinavia and Germany broke out and began to play the mischief with the dominion of the Gauls. To the scandal of comfortable, settled minds, Ibsen kept secrets of incident from his audience; secrets of character too—a sin, some thought, deadlier still. Cardinal facts, like the manner of Beata's death in "Rosmersholm," on which all hinged, were only let out towards the ends of plays. Torvald Helmer and Consul Bernick were introduced, in apparent good faith, as worthy men and brothers, only to be gradually exposed as subtly whited sepulchres. To the still graver scandal of critical orthodoxy, audiences seemed to enjoy it. The orthodox must have felt like the Thames watermen who had ascertained, by conversation among themselves, that if old London Bridge were removed, most of the Thames above it would flow clean away and

leave only a despicable beck for posterity. The dramatic river had the perversity to flow on, much as before, or rather better, and many of us who had sat at the mandarins' feet were forced to admit that at their respectable word we had made a mistake. The lesser dramatists timidly followed the greater. Just as Sir Arthur Pinero had cautiously taken Ibsen's hint that the necessity for copious asides and monologues was not imperious, so Mr. H. A. Jones took heart in his "Mrs. Dane's Defence" to keep quite a substantial secret from his audience; and "Mrs. Dane's Defence" became one of the most prosperous of his plays. In France itself one of the most telling of the plays of about the same period bore the eloquent name of "The Enigma" and turned on a secret kept from the audience throughout its greater part. And then came Mr. Barrie's puzzle, almost hoax, of "Little Mary," existing, you might say, to keep an audience well befogged.

The wheel, apparently, had now come full circle; the theatre seemed to have worked right through an elaborate and peremptory convention, its rise and its fall. Had we, then, come back to the point where things stood, for the moment at least, when the high horse in dramatic criticism was being bestridden by Voltaire? Not really. For few of us now would agree with Voltaire in scout-

ing the old convention so far as to say that the "Œdipus Tyrannus" is done the wrong way, or that the Greeks had not got hold of a big truth when they played the dramatic game with all their cards on the table as they did, under the circumstances in which they did it, or that there is no serious difference between the conditions under which an important secret is held up in Jane Austen's "Emma," and the conditions attending a corresponding piece of reserve in a play. What has happened is that the terms on which audiences can be kept in suspense without loss of their attention have been studied more closely and with a stronger determination, not exactly to throw over an old convention, but to sift it and purge it of its dross, retaining obedience for so much of it as is really rooted in necessities of representation on a stage, and discarding so much of it as is merely accretive and parasitic, the graftings of spurious stuff by pedantry and craft superstition on the authentic stem. The modern proficient does not deny that the life's blood of drama is action; what he does say is, that this blood should be clean red; that action should be vital action, not mere racket. Already in 1665 Dryden put it that in plays "every alteration or crossing of a design, every new-sprung passion, and turn of it, is a part of the action, and much the noblest, except we conceive nothing to

be action till the players come to blows." And when Ibsen puts most of the mechanical action of a play outside it, in the past, and gives us, in the play itself, only or mainly the after-stir of the thoughts and passions that were left behind when that external action was over, Dryden and he are at one; they are both moderns. So, too, when Sudermann or Mr. Barrie holds up for a time a fact that earlier dramatists would have made haste to reveal, it is not that he does not hold, as they did, that audiences should not be wholly bewildered, it is that the more discriminant modern distinguishes mere confusion or perplexity of presentation from lucidity in the presentation of a doubt or enigma, and proves that if you can attain a sufficient clearness and attractiveness of statement you can safely state even conundrums.

In this the theatre, like other arts, enlarges its freedom by practising a more subtly exact obedience to its own laws. To clear itself of its impeding lumber of dead convention and tradition it penetrates farther to the real necessities imposed by the nature of its material, necessities to which those conventions and traditions themselves gave, in their origin, the tribute of recognition. It all brings us back to the Aristotelian conception of matter and form and the unending process of wearing down your matter, making what you leave of it

more and more perfectly organic, allowing none of it "to lie in cold obstruction and to rot," but filling it all with aptness for some function until—far-off, divine event—nothing inorganic, no *mere* matter, is left.

Some Points of Ibsen

IBSEN was the one man of his time who, having something of moment to say, was also able to say it through plays that took life when acted. It had been a time fairly rich in writers with "messages" and also in adepts at technical stagecraft. But as a rule the messengers had no stagecraft and the skilled play-makers had no message. Tolstoy and Browning would not act; Sardou had nothing that matters to say of life or death or anything under the sun. So true was this that there had grown up something like a habit of implying that in drama there was a kind of natural incompatibility between matter and form, and that we might not hope to see any more men who could think and write, in the widest sense, and who could also use to full account the cramping and arbitrary technics of the theatre. The notion was as absurd as it would be to suppose a thorough mastery of a difficult form like the sonnet to be incompatible with the highest poetic thought, or to suggest that

a man must needs be unable to compose great music because he is competent to conduct an orchestra. Now and then there comes, to show its absurdity, a Shakspere, Molière, Hugo, or Goethe, and such another proof was offered by Ibsen. Trained in the theatre, like nearly all the great dramatists, he knew precisely what a play was. He learned—central fact of all—that a play has only one-tenth the length of a novel; he learnt that a playgoer, unlike a reader, cannot skip, and that therefore he must never be let fall into the state of mind in which, if he were reading, he would skip; he learnt that dialogue is effective in a theatre only when every speech produces a distinct change in the relations of the speakers, that it must carry the hearer on over a rippled surface of small surprises to a foreseen goal, piquing curiosity in detail while meeting expectation on the whole; he learned how the characters of a play are mobilized; how their exits and entrances are brought into vital relation with the general purpose of the piece; how utterances, trivial and inexpressive in a poem or a novel, may take value and significance from the visible contact of their speakers with other persons or with a painted scene; how, on the other hand, telling effects characteristic of other forms of imaginative writing may be marred on the stage by the fact

that the playgoer cannot turn back and look things up, that the pace is fixed for him and not by him, or by the equally imperious fact that we may read in solitude, but must usually hear a play in a crowd, with our frame of mind more or less affected by finding ourselves face to face not merely with a work of art but the judgment of a public opinion upon it.

Many dramatists never, to the end of their careers, grasp all that the special conditions of theatrical representation mean and demand. Their plays remain essentially novels, or lyric or didactic poems, or pamphlets, or Socratic dialogues. Ibsen learnt his trade to begin with, and learnt it well. When one of his characters speaks, you feel that you really must hear the reply. When one of them comes upon the stage, you feel that for some minutes you have been coming to need his presence. When an early act of one of the plays ends, you are left with a definite sense of being half-way up a ladder to the top of a wall beyond which there is something interesting. He plays on you like a flute, and knows every vent and stop of your attention. To those who care about the technical qualities of plays, his plays give, on this score alone, a pleasure like that of seeing an expert contrive and exploit long series of happy combinations of position with billiard balls. In a sense it

is all mechanical, but so, in a sense, is the fingering of a Joachim. It is the indispensable mechanical basis of perfect freedom of self-expression in a difficult art. Having won that freedom and passed through a period of poetic idealism that bore memorable fruit, but was less thoroughly characteristic of his genius, Ibsen set himself to the great work of his career. In the series of prose plays beginning with "The League of Youth," he presented his contemporaries and countrymen with what he believed to be a truthful picture of their life. He, of course, passed no direct comments of his own. His long apprenticeship to art would have made that clumsy method impossible. And occasionally, when the enthusiasm of admirers or the anxiety of critics to find a good point of attack threatened to fasten upon him the character of a preacher of a certain stereotyped doctrine, he would break out with a play like "Hedda Gabler," which bewildered the would-be disciples with a picture of the tragic grotesquenesses to which that very doctrine might lend itself. His "message," if we must speak of messages, was not a body of precepts. He did not tell people how they ought to live, but how their lives looked to his eyes. He found, for instance, that a great part of European literature, and almost the whole European stage, had habituated itself to find a pleasing, sentimental

spectacle in marriage of a commonplace type between husbands a little higher than Turks and wives a little higher than dolls. He did not denounce the sort of morality or immorality which glossed over the shortcomings of such half-unions. He simply represented them as he saw them, and left people to form what judgments they might. People must decide for themselves how to act; he offered only to help them to see more clearly the situation in which they were by representing it with literal exactitude as he saw it himself.

Many will still remember the profound sensation created throughout Europe when Ibsen's plays of social life began to be acted, and not least in England, where the stage had for many years almost abandoned the attempt to reflect seriously the life of the day. It was startling to pass from the sentimental unrealities of Robertsonian comedy and the indigestible suppers of horrors and coincidences in later melodrama to plays in which people thought and spoke about the things that do trouble or elevate people's existences. There rose a cry of outraged propriety, as if a leading preacher had attempted to apply Christian teaching to present-day politics. Mr. Meredith says of the large class who have a sentimental objection to the study of the actual world: "You may distin-

guish them by a favourite phrase, 'Surely we are not so bad!' and the remark, 'If that is human nature, save us from it,'" and no two remarks were more often audible when the first performances of Ibsen in London were filling whole classes of uneasy persons with a dim consciousness that something very like themselves was being publicly analysed. Like Wagner, Ibsen received from all Europe a twofold certificate of his importance, the voices of those whom he disturbed being as eloquent as those of his admirers. His ideas might be liked or disliked, but nobody found it possible to ignore them, and wherever the theatre was alive his innovations in technique were imitated, or at least experimented with, as eagerly as were the technical methods of Scribe. This, in fact, was the most striking feature of his reputation at the time of his death, that though his merits were nowhere wholly undisputed, the dispute was European and more. It is common enough for a dramatist to be overwhelmed with praise in his own country and not heard of abroad. It is a harder feat to set the whole world of intelligent readers and playgoers by the ears, debating furiously the question whether you are a great man.

To this day you will hear playgoers, after some new performance of Ibsen, exchanging the old battle-cries about his symbolism or non-symbolism. "Ibsen makes use of symbolism," one of them will say, with M. Faguet. "Ibsen has no symbolism," another will reply, with the great Brandes. "Symbolism is nearly always to be found in his writings," a third will cut in, with Mr. W. M. Payne. "There is not a symbol in the whole of Ibsen," the second will quote from Brandes again. That none of these swashing blows is lost to the world we owe, no doubt, to the blessed unfixity of language. Symbolism may mean anything from speaking in parables to the way of writing which seeks to trick the imagination into activity by a felicitous unreason—as it seems on cold inspection —in the choice and use of words. You may call Æsop a symbolist as well as Mr. Arthur Symons: the one word has to serve for things as far apart as the Belly-and-Members fable and the lines of Mr. Yeats about a peace that comes dropping from the veils of morning to where the cricket sings, the extreme of pedagogic explicitness and the extreme of elusive withdrawal into twilight dimnesses of meaning.

Within these outer extremes of symbolism in general the special symbolism of Ibsen's prose plays seems to fluctuate between two lesser

extremes of his own. Perhaps his use of the "irrational"—that is, more subtly significant—phrase to evoke emotions or suggest affinities too shy or fine for more downright and literal expression goes farthest in the "harps in the air" scenes of "The Master Builder"; and perhaps he comes nearest to the obvious apologue in the quickly written "Enemy of the People." Every one knows that he wrote it to give himself back his own when all the stupid and vicious people, and some others, were calling his "Ghosts" immoral: that in some ways, though by no means in all, Dr. Stockmann stands for Ibsen, the seaside town of the play for Norway, the tainted water-supply for the unexamined current morality, and the "compact majority" for the Whiggish official "Liberal" party and Press, who had not stood by the more Radical Ibsen during the row. If this be symbolism, of course Ibsen has it. A question harder to answer, when you have just seen the play acted, is whether this symbolic value has anything to do with one's enjoyment. Would it matter if one had never heard of the whole "Ghosts" controversy? Is the parable, like that of the Prodigal Son, quite able to stand alone on its intrinsic beauty or interest, without reference to its second intention, or would it, like the parable of the Draw-Net, seem a rather slight, dry affair if

taken simply as a study from seaside life? On some playgoers, certainly, the play has been known to leave an impression of much ado about little; they have been left cold enough by the first two acts to reflect, during the third, that Hovstad and Aslaksen would surely have seen sooner that Dr. Stockmann's project would call for sacrifices all round.

If the symbolism of "An Enemy of the People" be venturesome, that of "The Master Builder" is a veritable gamble, a gamble to write and a gamble to act. At the imminent risk of obscurity it constantly attempts an intimacy of dialogue that nobody before had dared to try for. In the scenes between Solness and Hilda, Ibsen seeks to go behind words as they are usually employed, and to suggest an exchange of ideas carried on in a new code of communications more subtle and flexible. To many children and adults, abstract ideas—courage, self-control and so on—are never really abstract; their minds cannot fasten on these in their essence, as trained thinkers do; they figure them in some concrete way, tangled in action and matter, often in ways that seem strangely irrelevant, as happens to ideas in dreams, where they sometimes link themselves irresistibly with scenes, acts, or material objects to which you are rather shy of owning when awake, so gro-

tesquely little does the symbolical background or movement seem, in literal soberness, to have to do with the idea which it has been symbolizing; or, at least, so hopeless does it seem to express the nicety of the affinity through so clumsy a medium as one's own use of words. But now and then two persons in whom this process has been going on discover that they have hit on the same way of "visualizing" ideas, and that a kind of notation can be established between them which will record and communicate experiences too elusive to be conveyed in words used in their ordinary and primary senses. Mr. Kipling has tried to represent the institution of a correspondence of this kind in his story of "The Brushwood Boy." "The Master Builder" was an earlier attempt. And in a theatre, when someone titters at the "harps in the air," or at Hilda's rapture about the climb to the vane, you feel what a throw the dramatist and the actors are making—what a risk and what a stake. For if the throw comes off they give the spectator the rare and curious pleasure of tapping a new and particularly private sort of private wire between soul and soul But if they fail, if the spectator cannot pick up the code in good time, if he will not, as anæsthetists would say, go off well under the new drug, then what a mess there is of it!

We have once seen Hilda done well, by Miss Octavia Kenmore. She gave the part all that it wanted —the high vitality, the childlike candour, the non-morality rather than immorality, the troubled ecstasy of a mind exhilarated with the exercise of a new sense and ranging its own emotions with the delight and the fears of an explorer. A less fine artist might have laboured to work up a more-is-meant-than-meets-the-ear effect, wherever Hilda uses language out of its literal meaning; Miss Kenmore preserved in the character a girlish simplicity direct enough to wreck whole civilizations, and yet she was "like them that dream"; she spoke like a natural person in a state of unnatural exaltation; the highly figured language, with its charge of symbolic values, came tumbling out of her mouth like indiscretions from a terrible child in its hours of most flowing inspiration. And yet the venture was nearly always in danger; a part of the audience was restive. Some of us felt that in these scenes of Hilda and Solness the author had disengaged and liberated new powers in the soul—new, at least, as matter for dramatic presentation; others, that what they were hearing was gibberish.

It is strange ; there were people once who called "Ghosts" immoral. Was this, you ask now when you see it, the play that launched a thousand ships of critical fury? Why, it is rendingly, scaringly moral. When it is before you, you feel that some truths about conduct, which you had thought you knew pretty well, can only have been known as one knows a beast safely caged in a Zoo, since now they are going about glaring at you with fanged mouths open ; they have turned terrifyingly real. It is fairly arguable that—as Mr. Archer seems to feel—the fierceness of moral intention in "Ghosts" prevents it from ranking with Ibsen's best work. It has a kind of aghast grimness, a bald, austere hardness of conception and dry, level tensity in the working out that seem more expressive of the strong man rightly angered by preventable wrong than of the artist excited and even, in a sense, delighted by everything in the world, good and bad. Perhaps it was some sense of this that made Brandes say, when the play first came out and the foolish people were howling, that it might or might not be Ibsen's greatest work, but it was certainly his noblest deed. Immoral!

So was it, too, with "The Lady from the Sea" and "A Doll's House," those twin plays, in each of which a woman has married not, in the full sense of the words, by her own act. In both cases there

follows a strain which the poor half-union of a marriage of drift will not stand. In both cases the half-marriage may either be unmade by this crisis or re-made into a true and whole marriage of characters. Through differences in the other parties to the two contracts, Nora's marriage fails and, apparently, ends, while Ellida's just as logically attains the completeness it had missed. Nora's husband will not face the breaking of the ill-set joint; Ellida's husband does; he breaks it for her, and, broken, it can be re-set, and this time set rightly. Ibsen is equally clear and veracious, whether he shows the good surgery at work or the bad. And yet people used to cry out about the strange, shocking novelty of such plays. Really the only things new about them were the force and decency of the treatment. The marriage of toleration converted—after some risk of breakdown—into a marriage of affection is one of the commonplaces of the humdrum theatre. Mrs. Kendal used to act in whole cycles of plays about it—"The Ironmaster," "The Senator's Wife," and many more. The husband who, like Dr. Wangel, conciliates or dishes a wife who asks for freedom, by meeting her at least half-way, is much older even than "Divorçons" or "La Petite Marquise." The chief difference between "The Lady from the Sea" and plays like these is that

they usually treated such themes mawkishly or morbidly, or with knowing nods and becks and wreathed leers. There really did exist all the time a third possible way of handling them besides the penny-novelette manner on the one side and the smoke-room manner on the other, and this third way was Ibsen's discovery. That he conceived with dignity and truth a subject of such frightfully common and intense human interest as unideal wedlock and the chances of perfecting it—that is the main thing unusual about "The Lady from the Sea."

On another side "The Lady from the Sea" is apt to give, when played, an impression of middlingness. Can any actress overcome the difficulty of making the Nereid or Venus Anadyomene side of Ellida fully effective? Miss Achurch, well as she acts the part, cannot quite make it smack richly of the sea. Of course the pursuit of this effect, in some form or other, is, again, an old game which is always being replayed. Synge played it to great purpose in his prose "Riders to the Sea." A few years ago M. Jean Richepin played it prettily in his verse play of "Le Flibustier." Victor Hugo's proficiency every one knows. To the reader of the play Ibsen certainly gives a moderate sensation, at any rate, of salt on the lips, and no doubt it is eked out

a little in representation by Ellida's wearing sea-green dresses, by ultramarine fiord scenery and kindred aids. But you do not feel sure that Ibsen has killed the second bird too with his one stone —that he has achieved in a single prose play the exposition of a big case of conscience and also the full expression of a large poetic idea. Hence a new difficulty for the actor of the Stranger who plays the Forsaken Merman to Ellida's forsaking Mermaid. The part teases an audience's minds ; they do not quite know whether to take the Stranger for some kind of unorthodox ghost, or for a flesh-and-blood Enoch Arden, or for something distinct from either and having merely a symbolic value.

"The Wild Duck" has always puzzled many people, because at first sight it would seem to deride Ibsen's own chief ideas. Everywhere else —notably in "Pillars of Society" and "An Enemy of the People"—he glorifies a rigorous truthfulness ; here he shows a kind of truthfulness wrecking all before it. Elsewhere—especially in "Ghosts" and "A Doll's House"—he seems to exalt true marriage, a complete comradeship of souls and the pooling of all confidences, "pasts" and so forth ; here there is a woeful mess as soon as Hialmar's marriage ceases to rest on a good

thick substratum of lies and concealments. Why this look of inconsistency? The usual critical answer — Brandes, Jaeger, Lemaitre and Mr. Archer seem all to concur in it—is that in "The Wild Duck" Ibsen did actually turn and rend his own ideals, in a fit of savage bitterness at the mauling of "Ghosts" by the general public a year or two before. "As people will not have truth and the true marriage, well, let us tear these things to pieces and see how they like that." So Ibsen is supposed to have said to himself as he wrote "The Wild Duck," like a cat eating her kittens because boys have teased them.

Well, these are critics of weight; some of them knew Ibsen; he may have told them; and authors, we know, do have these fits of puerperal fever that go the whole length of infanticide sometimes. Such a fit was once thought to account for Sir Arthur Pinero's "Wife Without a Smile." And yet you may see "The Wild Duck" acted by good actors like Herr Andresen's Germans and never be struck with the thought that there is any infanticide to explain, or that you are witnessing a mockery of any ideal or idea of Ibsen's. That which is held up to scorn in Gregers Werle is not the love of truth but the lack of proportion, self-knowledge and humility in wooing her; that which is shown up in Hialmar Ekdal is not the man whose mind

can frame ideals of marriage, but the man whose mind is such a soiled-linen basket of old, tumbled, unfelt phrases that all veracity of thought and feeling about marriage or anything else is clean beyond his power. You may feel that Gregers is derided, not because he wants to serve truth, but because he does not recognize the limits of his own fitness to press himself into her confidential service and discharge her most difficult commissions; and that Hialmar is derided, not because he tries to hold up an ideal of marriage, but because he has so debilitated his whole soul with lying, self-pity and sloth, that it cannot hold up anything for more than a few seconds.

All this, so far from clashing with Ibsen's other "teaching," may seem to you rather to confirm and supplement it. Who should try to extirpate the maladies threatening the followers of a fine cause but those who care for that cause most? Who should subscribe to the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine if not the criers-up of Equatorial colonization? Sudermann, in his "Sturmgeselle Sokrates," mocked at a certain kind of wind-bagginess to which democracy is liable; but he did it not because he was an anti-democrat, but because he was an intense democrat. It was as one of the great Liberals of the modern world that Ibsen himself, in "The League of Youth," chas-

tised the gaseousness and selfishness of a certain set of Liberals in his own country. The right dog to beat is your own. In "The Wild Duck" Ibsen lays about him in his kennels: he kicks out a few impostors that have stolen in; but you may argue that he does nothing inconsistent with himself any more than he does in "Pillars of Society" when he holds Lona up to admiration, and Hilvard, the muff who "waves the ideal banner high," to ridicule.

Ibsen's strange last word, "When We Dead Awaken," is famed for its power of puzzling an audience. Even the Berlin Deutsche Theater, great as it is at Ibsen, is said to have scarcely unravelled the puzzle at all. Good acting, indeed, may only add extra tangles, by giving insistent life to some minor means to mystification which, with luck, you might fail to notice when reading. Certainly, when Miss Octavia Kenmore, a true actress of Ibsen, acted Irene, the play as a whole affected us like a large, complicated machine working in a dark room; one peered in here and there, and saw part of a wheel going round with apparent purpose, or a piece of belting that seemed to imply coherence in the whole apparatus, but the next moment it whirled on undistinguishably, and even that small clue was lost. There remained some striking

impressions—the strongest of them that of the tragic gloom of the second long dialogue between Rubek and Irene, the two burnt-out souls, poking about together in their own ashes—and the dialogue had the old trick of absorbing your attention even if it did not reward it. But one came away with a fine confused stock of sensations, doubts, and grievances—not against the actors, whose reputation as torches should not suffer for the impenetrability of the fog, but against Ibsen himself, or the decay that—as Mr. Archer inclines to think—was clouding his genius when he wrote this play, as Scott's was clouded when he wrote "Count Robert of Paris."

What, for one thing, possessed Ibsen to make so much turn on that laboriously described group of sculpture? It is nearly always prostratingly dull to have the characteristic effects of one art described in the medium of another. If any bores surpass those who try to thrill you with verbal accounts of pictures and pieces of music, it must be the painters who try to do the same to you by painting Hamlet at the play, or Saint Cecilia in full blast at one of her own compositions. Why, again, should Ibsen, after a life of judicious frugality in scenery, suddenly give up all care for practicableness and go the pace he does here with his snow-peaks and avalanches, as if he were writing an

"autumn drama" for Drury Lane? No theatre in this world could mount the play according to its stage directions. Was he really not caring whether it would act or not? And then the meaning? If it be not all symbolic it is little worth, for the plot, at its face-value, seems both wild and trivial. But if it be symbol, what does it symbolize? Does Rubek figure for us an Ibsen repining like Matthew Arnold in "Growing Old"? Is Irene the poetic drama, deserted by him for the less ideal Maia of his prose plays? Or is it a parable of the bad bargain that an artist may make in sacrificing the whole-hearted, headlong fruition of life to the austere business of standing apart to observe and express it? Or is Irene an embodiment of the perfect love, the authentic passion not to be disobeyed but at risk of atrophy to the soul, and does Rubek embody the spirit of compromise and accommodation that will not leave all and follow, but lingers to make terms and insure risks and put itself generally right with the world while the acceptable moment is passing? Is Squire Ulfheim, that super-virile sportsman, the genius of conquering vitality and sane animalism? Is Irene's black-robed attendant formal religion, the Church, viewed with some blend or other of sympathy and irony? And if everybody is something, what on earth is the Inspector at the Baths?

How odd, again, is the apparent casting back by an aged dramatist to the youthful theme of the indefeasible rights of passion! We believe the naturalists find in some birds a phenomenon called pseudo-erotism, or some such name, a kind of passing impulse to build nests in bare trees in the autumn, when more normally constituted birds are already half-way to Africa. Possibly in Ibsen's art there was some counterpart to that. If so, the sensuousness is singularly unsensuous. A clammy cold mist is over it all. The people cry up the roses and raptures of Swinburnian ethics in tones that would freeze a faun and send a Bacchante to the nearest Methodist chapel in search of doctrine less shiversome.

Still, be these things said with all diffidence and openness to correction. It is rather a cheap game to run people down because you cannot see what they are at, as boys perceive at school that "Euclid is all rot"; safer, perhaps, to assume that an art as potent as Ibsen's has got hold of something, even here. Likely enough, when we stupid awaken, we shall find the queer, tough play a big thing, and even a clear one.

Shakspere's Way with Agincourt

TOLD that a man broke his leg, or found a bag of gold, a child will ask: "What did he say?" Grown up, it will do much the same, wishing to know what it was, or might very well be, that men and women found to say at great or strange turns in their lives. To this incessant question drama offers an incessant answer, and "Henry V." is a good, because a simple, instance of the way a dramatist may set about the work. The play's plot is simple: most of us know it beforehand. An English King goes to war with a French King, invades France, finds himself, with 15,000 men, face to face with a French army of 75,000, fights and routs them, and makes such a peace as he would wish. That is the whole of what matters. France, so to speak, breaks her leg; England finds a bag of gold; what did they say when it happened, and also before it? What *do* a General and his army say among themselves on the eve of a fight for huge stakes, against odds

of five to one? And what sort of things are said at that time in the camp of an army ripe to be beaten next day by another one-fifth of its size? To these questions Shakspere devises full answers, laying out the work for himself by inventing several little incidents which would naturally lead typical speakers in both camps to put into words the feelings with which they went into the fight and came out of it.

That curiosity of the child's is, of course, only part of a larger curiosity, and expresses it. What possessed the man to let his leg be broken? How came the bag of gold to be there? And how came 15,000 men to defeat 75,000? Shakspere, in fact, is asked to explain Agincourt. But, then, what do you mean by explanation? In asking, in a general way, what made the 15,000 men beat the 75,000, you ask not for one explanation, but for many. Was there anything in the lie of the ground that would help a smaller force or incommode a large one, or was there some fatally false tactical move on one side, some golden chance grasped by a master of war on the other? That is the explanation for which you ask the expert soldier or military historian. Or, again, was there reached on that day the climax of a tale which deep differences of national habit in work, in diet, in social usage, had long been telling

on the relative strength of two races, so as at last to render five men of the one no match for one man of the other? That is the explanation you seek from the student of economic and social history. Yet again, were there some momentous differences of political organization that went to make the one army a compact, united, highly organic whole, and to leave the other a loosely linked crowd? That explanation you ask of the student of politics. And these are only three out of many relevant lines of explanation, for there is scarcely any end to the multitude of causes, economic, political, physiological, and what not, of which an event like Agincourt is likely to have been, in some measure or other, the result.

To approach an exhaustive explanation the most you can do is to pick out, turn by turn, and isolate, so far as you can, this, that, or the other, separate set of forces that may have been at work. Thus the tactician, when asked that question, may go to work by saying: "Suppose, provisionally, that each of the 15,000 men on the one side was equal at all points, physical, intellectual, moral, to each of the 75,000 on the other. Can I, then, simply by reference to the lie of the ground and to the use that may have been made of it by each commander, frame any supposition on which a victory against odds so great would be readily explicable?"

The economist, the statesman, the physiologist, and the rest, each from his own starting point, will work in a similar way; each will let go all but one particular part of the event; each will abstract on a great scale, will of set purpose treat the event one-sidedly, discarding most of its aspects so as to concentrate on the aspect which falls within the scope of the special body of principles of which he is in charge. All the strongest and most fruitful thought about things is of this kind: it was so that Newton thought about the apple, disregarding wholly its colour and taste and nutritive and economic value and the properties of malic acid. For to a non-divine mind there can usually be no uncovering of the whole kernel of the truth of a thing. To gain even a glimpse of a part of one side of the stone, the intelligent human worm must choose its own point on the surface of the fruit and then bore his little separate hole inward towards the centre, working in a freely chosen darkness for the chance of access to a speck of the surface of its core.

In some respects, though not at all in others, poetry comes very near science in its method. What Shakspere does, in his own way, with Agincourt, is just what each of those scientific students does with it in his. Putting aside all questions of topography, tactics, economics and the rest, he

seems in the play to be asking himself to what forces in human character such an event may be traced. What Holinshed had recorded as a fact, Shakspere interprets, as the phrase is, psychologically and in no other way. He only seeks to find out to what special sources and qualities of fire, force, and steadfastness of soul on one side, and to what debilities of spirit on the other, it may be due that the Davids do sometimes beat the Goliaths. Of what uniform and permanent moral laws (laws in the scientific sense) is it, if of any, that these upsettings of long odds may illustrate the validity? To answer those questions through dialogues between picked representatives of the two sides at Agincourt is to treat Agincourt dramatically. And the dramatic poet, in offering this hypothetical explanation of Agincourt in terms of human motive alone, goes about the work of illuminating history just as scientifically as the expert surveyors who go to Marathon and rewrite history, to its great advantage, by the light of arithmetic and a measuring-chain.

Shakspere, then, using this method, puts it to us, roughly speaking, that one man may be so charged with incentives to right valour as to be quite a match for five men eaten up with maladies of will and temper. All of the play that comes before Agincourt is a study, on one side, of the

springs of high and sane martial courage, and, on the other, of the flashiness and trashiness of a gaudy, overblown martialism, rank and running to seed. One danger, in drawing such a contrast, is lest it should seem too rigid, absolute and naïve, and another is lest it should become indistinguishable from the vulgar theatrical incense to false patriotism. Shakspere heads off both these dangers at once by reduplicating on a small scale within the English army itself the contrast between the spirit dominating it and the French army; the relations of Fluellen and Pistol are made to bear out the significance of those between Henry and the Dauphin. Still, the main contrast is, of course, between the two camps.

The ugly picture is the easier of the two, for the dramatist and for the actor. Shakspere's power was not severely taxed to paint the flaunting carnival of brag, the egoism, the fantastic insolences and brutalities ("I will trot to-morrow a mile, and my way shall be paved with English faces") in the French camp; and these standard moral deformities are, like Pistol's comic baseness, well within the reach of competent actors. But Henry was, and is, hard to do. He stands for his army and country, and has to be clothed with enough moral sinews of war to make their victory seem inevitable. And sheer fortitude, the inmost

keep of the fortress of the "'stablished soul," is extremely difficult to represent through speech and gesture. It is reticent, contained and stoical ; and reticence, containment, stoicism, are all undramatic virtues. Of their nature they refuse to abound in saliences and effectivenesses of visible and audible expression. And to represent on the stage this simple, intense and inexpressive quality of fortitude raised, in the mathematical sense, to a very high power, is as hard as the painter's old problem of painting the sun's portrait at midday, full face. Shakspere's plan is to work out Henry's heroism in rather fine detail, passing his metal through one different test after another before our eyes, and showing us the successive reactions obtained. There are the flout with the tennis-balls, the rapid assaying by successive emotions in the scene with the traitors, the vicissitudes of war at Harfleur and after it, and finally the homely but formidable assault of Williams. The play is packed with devices, too, for bringing into relief traits of comradeship, courtesy, compassion, magnanimity, and humbleness of heart, traits separable from the higher forms of courage, and yet so commonly found where a high courage is that their presence gives you, as if by refracted light, an impression of the presence of courage itself.

All this demands of the actor a rare fertility in

such significant and delicate modulations of voice and gesture as reflect the controlled play of feeling in a nature firmly held in by itself and yet the reverse of insensible. In the giving to Mountjoy of the first message for the French camp, in the little gem of dialogue with Erpingham, in the defence of the King's moral position against the criticism of Williams, in the prayer before the fight, and in the gallant rhetoric of the Crispin Day speech, one asks for something beyond ready analysis in the inflections of the voice, to give one a direct inlet into a mind strung up to the heroic tension. The symbolism of acting in its higher reaches becomes more potent and more elusive at the same time; as other arts do at the like heat, it widens the distance which separates it from mere literal copying and enumeration of traits; like them it gets rid of its "matter," in the Greek sense, as distinct from "form," and approaches the condition of fine music, in which matter seems wholly absorbed into form; for the moment all manhood and the ringing truth of a great tenor's note are, to you, indistinguishably one, and the actor of Henry V. should do some such miracle, not deluding your senses with little exactitudes of naturalism, but setting your imagination a-quiver with the tone or quick glance that flashes upon you the idea of the whole universe of a brave character.

There is—to go back a little and dress up a commonplace—some gain of truth in Shakspere's method of laying aside the "facts," as they are sometimes called too sweepingly, of a certain historic triumph over great odds. You only rise into the region of true mathematical thought when you think, not of this or that ring or child's hoop or outer rim of a penny, but of a circle as something clear and independent of the gold or wood or copper of all these. And so you may image the moral fact of an Agincourt with a purer veracity, you may conceive it really in a less imperfect way, and under fewer limitations, and penetrate farther towards its universal and essential element, which makes it one with other Agincourts, and gives all Agincourts their supreme interest, if you neglect for a moment facts of topography, facts of economics, facts of strategy, and so on, as completely as a geometrician, in making an effort of geometrical thought, neglects the facts that his lines are of chalk and his spaces of paper, and arrives at a wider truth by dint of going on the false assumption that a line perceptibly wide has length without breadth and that a point with a measurable diameter has position but no area. The mathematician's abstract conception of a circle or a triangle does not cover all the facts of the circle or triangle drawn on his sheet

of paper, nor all the facts of any circle or triangle ever seen by the bodily eye; and yet it is, on that very account, the better means to perfect knowledge of the essential nature and implications of those and all other circles and triangles; and so it may be that a dramatic poet's conception of Agincourt, falling far short, as many would say, of the known facts of the case, even arbitrarily doing without them, may all the more surely arrive at a true insight into the working of the forces that fall within its own scope.

Wherever you look in Shakspere you find good examples of this preference for the more to the less universal truth. See the chief scene in "Measure for Measure." A youth is to be put to death next day, and his sister comes to tell him that he would be spared if she would yield to the lust of the judge who condemned him. The youth fears death so much that he begs her to yield. She refuses, and leaves him to his fate. The story was already an old one in Shakspere's day: many of those who first saw the play must have known the tale well. They knew how Claudio would be tempted and would break, and that Isabella would stand fast. But what would he say? In what terms would his honour surrender? Shakspere answers the question by putting into Claudio's mouth the most superbly eloquent ex-

pression ever found for the dread and hatred that the live flesh and quick mind have of death. In a few lines he sums up and enhances all that men have ever feared from the grave; the hells of Homer and Virgil, of Orcagna and Jeremy Taylor, seem, beside this, like mere illustrations or amplifications of some fragments of its loaded significance. Now, in one obvious sense, this is not true to life. Weak gilded youths like Claudio do not in human experience utter the first masterpieces of human eloquence on any topic. Under the raised arm of death these half-formed characters are more apt to whine and grovel than to state the case for fear so gloriously as almost to give to fear itself a touch of grandeur. It is quite credible that you might go through all the known cases of men who had done base things to keep their lives and that you would not find one whose utterance at the crisis of his ordeal was not in violent contrast with that of Claudio in point of coherence, force, picturesqueness, compression, and every good quality. And yet Claudio's speech sounds ringingly true, because it is a perfect expression not of what any particular man in Claudio's situation was likely to say, from what we know of terrified human nature, but of what we feel to be the most essential thoughts and instincts governing nearly all men so situated, at that time, and expressed by none. A wild

entreaty for life at any price, it is yet so worded as to form a consummate epitome of the whole system of emotional forces that might press upon a rakish young man of the late Middle Age or early Renaissance when thus begging for mercy—the mere sheep's shrinking from the knife, the child's fear of going in the dark, civilized man's idea of his own self-consciousness as a marvel and treasure, the medieval European's profound sense of the detailed menaces of hell as it appeared to contemporary Christianity. So, through particular untruth, a universal truth is achieved.

Oscar Wilde's Comedies

IF you thought of Wilde's work, before Mr. Ross's "collected edition" came out, as the sum of a great many very bright flashes, all separate—flashes of wit in the plays, of quickness in critical essays, of beauty in some of the verse, and of spiritual insight in parts of "De Profundis," —you find in reading this edition that the impression was no accident, nor due to your own trick of dipping, but one that grows only the stronger the more you read Wilde in the mass, or see his plays acted. His was a genius that wanted the instinct for structure; he wrote like an architect scamping the main lines and masses of all that he built, caring mainly for morsels of curious or sumptuous incrustation to light up the next space of wall. His verse is often beautiful with the beauty of a tangle of climbing flowers with no trellis to climb up, each trying to climb up the others till all are weighed down to the ground in a mess; images finely poetic are tumbled out, one after another, as

richly as in "Lycidas," but no whole poem is held up by the firm logical framework which Wilde's master, Pater, delighted to trace in Milton's poem, under its ornament. In drama Wilde ran so short in architectural skill that he would hang full panoplies of his brilliants upon a worn-out clothes-horse of a plot like that of "An Ideal Husband." In criticism, especially in the absorbing "Critic as Artist" dialogue, he achieved a wonderful proportion of separate rightnesses of estimate, for one whose critical method was a mere denial of method and almost of coherence. In "De Profundis," again, you are often amazed by the freshness of illumination cast for an instant on some theme so big and so staled by bad comment as the Gospel miracles by one who as some other page shows—had not mastered the simplest conditions of an effectual, or even an unabridged, life.

Wilde had choice powers: the old attempts to dismiss him as a literary mountebank, or only a vulgar immoralist, or an adventurer bluffing his way to external success with nothing but a clever Irish undergraduate's turn for aping anything he pleased, were sorry blunders. But his powers had flaws that made these blunders natural. He seems to have had intellectual independence and originality in the second degree, but not the first. He did not depend on people's assent, but he did partly

depend on their dissent and astonishment. The passion to *épater le bourgeois*, to knock the stupid party all of a heap each time that you open your mouth, is itself a form of parasitism: for where would you be without the *bourgeois* to keep you going with his horror? This secondary form of parasitism is discernible in nearly all that Wilde wrote; one feels it to be setting him against his own natural growth; it almost seems as if the sovereign sanity attained through purest independence by a Meredith might have come to Wilde if he could have borne not to maintain his first maximum of offence to dull people.

Possibly that is too sanguine; for Wilde, like Disraeli, showed a strain, perhaps irremediable, of second-rateness in the craving of his imagination for curious, bedizened, exotic, or abnormal stuff to work on. Unlike the greatest imaginations—Fielding's, Scott's, Burns's, Hugo's—which are always making some old and plain thing new again, Wilde's was always seeking refuge in strange places from its own inability to do this; and, as every step in this flight from the trite increases the trodden area, he was always driven farther and farther into paradox and perversity. But a sense of this limit that Wilde imposed on his powers need mar no one's delight in his fine lifts of eloquence, his melody, or the passionate in-

genuity of his critical arguments, and least of all in the uncommon two-deep wit of his comedies, in which the people are witty themselves and also are placed in a circumambient atmosphere of the author's own wit, his irony playing on them while theirs plays on each other.

Like many good artists, Wilde began by imitating rapturously. In 1908 his early verse tragedy, "The Duchess of Padua," written in 1882, was reprinted from a prompt copy, which Wilde's second thoughts had, about 1891, blue-pencilled severely. The deletions show what a sound critic he was of verse, even his own. Thus we find struck out the two last of the lines:

> "Draw your sword, Guido,
> And traffic quickly for my life with Death,
> Who is grown greedy of such merchandise."

No doubt the Tudor "conceit," which may have seemed the very rose of poetry in 1882, struck Wilde as a merely refrigerative piece of decoration in 1891. And revision has cut out many banal pieces of figuration like:

> "The shipman's needle is not set more sure
> Than I am to the lodestone of your love."

But to make the play anything more than a fine, fervid outburst of young admirations for many

things written before it, Wilde in his adult mind would have had to omit it all but a few groups of lines here and there. Such a play is really criticism. Wilde's—

"Tarry for me;
Our souls will go together,"

is a delighted criticism of the older

"Tarry, sweet soul, for mine, then fly abreast."

Lady Macbeth says, after the murder, that "A little water clears us of this deed," and, later, "Who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" and Wilde's Duchess, having killed her husband, comments:

"I did not think he would have bled so much,
But I can wash my hands in water after."

Dogberry counsels the watch against thief-taking, for "they that touch pitch will be defiled"; and Wilde's comic man says that, since the dead Duke had been wicked, the murderer "should not have touched him; if one meddles with wicked people one is like to be tainted with their wickedness." People write so in youth, even if they have a genius growing in them such as came to full growth in Wilde's finest comedy. It is not plagiarism; it is rather that the world presented by imaginative art

is then so much more importunately actual and moving than "real life" that its re-representation seems the only possible object of artistic effort; and though the poetry thus written is derivative, it often has a genuine heat of passion for its originals, and so it is good criticism and good illustrator's work, though, as creation, it is two degrees removed from reality. "The Duchess of Padua" is a revel of literary appreciations—of the terrific "curtains" of Victor Hugo, the sympathetic thunder of "King Lear," the clotted bloodiness of Webster, the Shaksperean contrast of high passion with super-stolid, super-literal clowning—though Wilde can hardly have fully enjoyed Shakspere's clowns, so unlaughable are his own; that they should ever have come from the writer who also wrote "The Importance of being Earnest" confirms Sophocles' observation, since adopted by Lancashire, that "there's nowt so queer as folk."

"Lady Windermere's Fan" was Wilde's first success with a world which it half mocked and half flattered. Its plot was propelled by theatrical commonplaces. The incident of the fan had just been used by Mr. Haddon Chambers in "The Idler." Lady Windermere's doctrine of tit-for-tat in conjugal infidelity had been expounded in full by at least one heroine of the younger Dumas. The reappearance of a divorced wife to rescue a

daughter, who does not know her, from risk of a similar fate, had been used in the "Révoltée" of Lemaître, if not elsewhere. Wilde in this play gave the public a great deal of what it was already known to like; but also he made it like—at least made it accept—one thing which was not such sure merchandise—the coherent treatment of Mrs. Erlynne's character to the end. The dialogue was sometimes forced and tedious. In the third act the play's action made an almost dead halt to accommodate a string of highly-worked-up witticisms, machine-made, second-rate, crude and unprepared in the manner of their introduction. But much of the play was amusing. Surprisingly like many plays of no moment, adapted from middling French writers by middling English ones, it was still always better than these wherever it did differ from them; and at the end of the first act the dialogue was salt and rapid, the real dialogue of comedy.

Then came "A Woman of No Importance," and for a long time after the rise of the curtain one wondered, Would there be a play at all? There was talking, not drama. On the terrace of a country house persons were shown launching at at each other illustrated reminiscences of Wilde's "Intentions," a critical volume in which the best ways to flout and puzzle the Philistine mind are

fully explained. From their clothes and the qualities of their voices one gathered that there were a few broad differences between the persons on the terrace. Some were men, some women, one an Archdeacon, one an American. But, except for these shallow, if broad, distinctions of sex, country and business, they were nearly all identical in character for a good while. They did not build themselves individualities in their talk; they only took turns to talk in the same way. They passed the whole act in the composition of couplets of speeches: first a question, then its answer—first couplet; then a quite disconnected second question, drawing its answer—second couplet. "What is a bad man?" asked some character—you soon forgot which. "The sort of man who admires innocence," answered another, quite pat. Then the audience gaped; here and there a spectator felt that he saw it, and he raised an isolated laugh, a little late. Then the game began again. Was it not the frivolity of the wife, somebody asked, that most often spoilt marriages? Somebody else took three steps across the carpet and, planting himself in the midst of the party said with solemnity: "More marriages are ruined nowadays by the common sense of the husband than by anything else." A slight sound from the auditorium would follow this sally, not exactly applause or mirth, but

what is suggested by the parenthetic phrase in police reports, "sensation in court." On the stage, meanwhile, they went at it again, always in the form of a disjointed catechism, burlesquing the catch phrases of conventional morals or of mechanical friendliness.

It was mostly clever, not always new—how often had we heard, even then, that "good Americans, when they die, go to Paris"?—and generally the effect of labour had not been smoothed out or tidied away. Most of the questions and answers might, without loss of aptness, have been taken from their appointed utterers, shaken up in a bag, and distributed anew. As "criticism of life" they would then have been only equally futile; as means of explaining character or forwarding the play's action they were insignificant anyhow. After more than one act of this stationary, ingenious, and obscure entertainment, Wilde began a play with a telling final scene, and, when that scene came, he wrote it capitally, kept his audience intent, and achieved in his heroine a strain of noble disdain finer than anything he had yet done in dramatic emotion. But this change to real drama caused a dreadful mortality among the undramatic figures of the first act. As the play went on, all but three of its characters disappeared. As soon as dramatic business was meant there was clearly no place

for them; they had to pack up their epigrams and go.

In "An Ideal Husband," Wilde's next play to be acted, his comic genius was not to reach its full height, but at least it was to prove how indolently a man of comic genius may write a comedy and yet not fail. Its plot, its incidents, the main lines of its characters are half invented, half cribbed, as lazily or hurriedly as anything in Shakspere or Molière, those arch-cribbers. As a mainspring for plays the blackmailing lady who keeps whole catacombs of dark pasts, steals jewels freely, and is received at embassies, may indeed be junior to the everlasting hills—it depends on the age of the hills—but the world of stormed barns and penny gaffs has no older inhabitant. Then the tangle of the plot is not really disentangled at all; it is merely exorcised; miracles happen whenever Wilde cannot undo one of his knots. For example: A has to know, in order to make things get on, that B is hiding in the next room, so B kicks down a chair, noisily. C, for the same good end, has to force upon D the physical possession of a brooch; so the brooch becomes convertible, against the nature of brooches, into a bracelet, and the bracelet has a secret spring, and C knows the spring and D does not, and thus, by heaping improbability upon improbability, the literal fetter that is needed for the

lady's arm is called out of the vasty deep. Or consider the idleness of the thinking; compare the cutting of the ethical knot here, when the wife and husband are relieved, not from his past act of profitable baseness, but from the mere fear of its detection, with the facing of the same difficulty by Ibsen in "A Doll's House."

On this heap of stale loans Wilde sheds wit and mischief till the old stuff gleams and twinkles with comic lights direct and refracted, a dancing lustre unlike any other, and somewhat exotic. For people quite English do not talk like these people of Wilde's. Of course the paradoxical line is followed in England, as elsewhere, often enough. Paradox is inevitable in social groups where saltness of speech is a point of honour and where wit is not universal; for paradox is usually the announcement of a sense of the necessity of brilliancy, with or without the power to achieve it. But the play of mind in Wilde's Londoners of quality is usually that of English men and women whom a quick-witted Frenchman or Irishman is coaching, prompting, briefing, and at the same time watching, delicately mocking. Behind the immediate gaiety and irony of their talk you feel a reserve of irony not given to them for their use, but used against them, playing upon them, and playing, through them, on the audience too: it

comes out in the more obvious epigrams, thrown down like little bombs, as if in a derisive offer to match with their shouted emphasis some understood dullness and literalness in the hearer's mind; and again it comes out in the reticent gravity with which Chiltern, the accepted public man, the phrasing dullard, is presented, as if Wilde half thought that the public might take him seriously, and, for mischief's sake, would not give them the hint not to do so. The play is so drenched in comedy that it cannot but keep an audience laughing; but with the laughter there seems to go some perplexity; one fancies, an uneasy sense of something alien to the spectator's blood, and of a blurring of the confines of lawful fun and levity.

In his last acted comedy, "The Importance of Being Earnest," Wilde's art does not quite shed its faults, but he gains the upper hand of them as he did nowhere else. He still turns out some machine-made or Gilbertian humours of simple inversion; he still fusses now and then about keeping up his name for paradox; he still gives his people some things to say that are not expressive of just those people, merely because they have come into his head and he cannot deny himself their use or will not wait to find something apter; and some of the characters—the parson, the governess, the she-dragon from Debrett—are old stage

dummies. But Wilde's other comedies were made of such failings; they are mere specks on the excellence of this one; here the detachable witticisms, the little candles and gilt balls and calico blossoms tied on, as it were, to a Christmas-tree, are relatively few, and the real flowers, the jests and telling things that grow out of the stem of the play, and express and expand it, are relatively many. In the French slang of the theatre, the *mots d'esprit* have become *mots de situation* also, and, to some extent, *mots de caractère* too; the verbal good things, besides their first glitter, take value from where they are placed in the play, and often give value by making some one's mood or character divertingly apparent.

All of this comedy is instantly amusing; you laugh, or at least your mental interior beams, at almost every speech. Mr. Shaw says it wastes your time because it does not touch you as well as amuse. But one may hold that laughter, like bread, is a thing that has worth in itself so far as it goes; the bread may also sustain a Ladysmith garrison, or the laughter may also conduce to Christian charity and brotherhood; but, even without these higher offices, bread and laughter are good. And this play is no mere rib-tickler, like some string of puns. All the early talk of Jack and Algernon is quite veracious social portraiture.

Among a portion of the comfortable unemployed, some fifteen years ago, there was current just that vein of chaff, a special blend of the knowing and the infantine, a kind of cynic simplicism. Perhaps it is extinct. If so, here is your document. Wilde catches the mental (not vocal) drawl, the pose of an adult egoism aping child-like *naiveté* in appetite, as cleverly as Swift, in his "Polite Conversations," seems to have hit off the frank parade of imbecility and grossness common in some modish people of his time. Again, it has been said that there is too much of mere stock farcical mechanics in the play —the symmetrical lying and counter-lying, the sham mourning, the dual christening, the fight for the muffins, and so on. But it is rather hard to say exactly when fun is mechanical and when it is not. You might call Trinculo's fun with the bottle mechanical, and Sganarelle's fun with the same beloved object, and much of the Bob Acres fun at the duel, and Tony Lumpkin's fun at the inn. It all depends an the account to which you turn your mechanism, and Wilde's use of his in this play is the work of a comic genius—Worthing's entry, for instance, in deep mourning for the brother whom he had only pretended to have, and whom he now pretends to have lost, to the house in which his friend is at the moment personating that fictitious brother. That entry is an example

of true theatrical invention. To an audience, knowing what it knows, the mere first sight of those black clothes is convulsingly funny; it is a visible stroke of humour, a witticism not heard but seen, and it is precisely a richness in this gift of scenic or spectacular imagination that most distinguishes dramatists from other imaginative writers.

Playgoing at Stratford-on-Avon

NOT with a quite easy mind does one come to Stratford-on-Avon for the high days of the local cult. "All things have rest and ripen towards the grave"—and are not cults things, and things which have been known to ripen past their prime with the furtive swiftness of pears? Who shall say on which particular May Day at Knutsford the soul of the ancient festival shook its wings and fled? Or in what year of "overwhelming success" the old fire at Ober-Ammergau will quietly go out? Revolving these things you go humbly about Stratford for your first day or two, not expecting much, and then you begin to wonder if the pear analogy may not be all wrong, and the Tennysonian major premise too. The cult, for all you can see, is not going bad in the least.

Perhaps the right thing to compare the cult to would be some early and vehemently vaccinated child which afterwards offers marvels of resistance to Xerxean armies of efficient bacilli. Poor

Stratford was inoculated soon and severely with the usual maladies of the show place. "Ye's" were sprinkled over its shop-fronts as if with a pepper-castor; the whole town was becoming one hoarding, and not for puffs of soap alone; pushing little persons had begun to paste themselves upon it bodily, their very corpses; "si monumentum quæris, circumspice"—look around the parish church; you will see the ugly rush that there was to be buried there; look around the town, at the votive statues, the fountains, the museum where obscure genius has consented to lay up the manuscript of its slighted masterpiece, for Shakspere's honour. Before the game was spoilt some thoughtful men had secured, as the markets say, at bed-rock rates, securities against oblivion that would have cost a Roman of the Empire some thousands of tons of bricks and a site on the Appian Way.

So portentously did the vaccination "take." Still, it stayed a plague worse than itself, and of the same kind. For some time all this poaching of immortality has been, if not stopped, afflicted with proper inconveniences. Nobody now can do as he likes with Shakspere's church; quite a respectable poet and eminent courtier has failed to break a way into the chancel, to conquer a tomb there for his wife. The "Ye's," it is true, lie where they fell, but it does not look as if, these last few

years, the pepper-castor had played much upon the main streets. Mr. Sidney Lee, who must bear a charmed life, has gone about pouring scientific solvents on "links with Shakspere" that had been easily passed off on the simple souls of two centuries. Mr. Benson must have done much by the wise and bold rigour with which he keeps dross and flummery out of the yearly performances at the theatre.

Each year on April 23, when Shakspere died, and may have been born, there is a little rite in the church. A parson gives an address, and then anyone who chooses may bring flowers to Shakspere's grave in the chancel. One trembles at the thought of an unsymbolistic race essaying this joint act of emotional symbolism, unhelped by the Gallic passion for such efforts. Yet all goes well and is simple and not hugger-mugger. The time I saw it a couple of thousand persons were there, mostly women; most of them carried little bunches of daffodils, wallflowers, primroses—anything. The divine who had to say a few words about Shakspere extricated himself with credit, and then every one filed past the poet's grave, all looking, in a surprising degree, as if it mattered to them that he had lived. Our preacher had spoken of Warwick-

shire stock as blended of Celt and Teuton. The ritual could not have gone off much better, even if the Celts had succeeded in holding the line of the Avon. But of course, as the Vicar had implied, Shakspere might have been a little different then.

Each year some big new thing is tried at the theatre by Mr. Benson. One of the biggest was Æschylus' Orestean trilogy, the three linked plays being run into one by telescoping Morshead's English translation. Perhaps before the curtain rose you sat asking yourself why people should do such things, and answered that it might be done for any one, two, or all of three distinct reasons. It might be to do little more than show just how a Greek stage looked and sounded when a play was going on; or it might be to give us a peep-hole into the way a Greek may have felt while it was going on; or, again, it might be to make us feel, as playgoers and not merely as students, those emotions of the Greek playgoer which it is still open to us to feel—that is to say, those emotions which did not depend for their intensity upon a state of mind habitual or easily accessible for Greeks, but extinct or barred now. Then the curtain went up and you found Mr. Benson's reproduction

of ancient externals careful, beautiful, a little old-fashioned. One used to be taught at school that the classic Greek theatre had two stages, one of them ten or twelve feet lower than the other; that some of the actors spoke from the lower stage, and some from the upper; and that when they had to embrace one another the lower ones went up a ten-foot ladder to get at the upper ones. Enough Greek theatres have now been dug up to show that this was wrong. An early classic Greek theatre seems to have had no stage at all; it was a circus; every one who acted, sang or danced did it on a round flat patch of earth stamped hard, with the ground round it sloping or terraced, like a Lancashire football-ground, so that spectators in the back rows could see over the heads of the front rows. At one point in the circumference of the arena was a tent or wooden shanty, for the actors to change their clothes in, and in the middle of the arena was an altar. Until quite late there was no marble palace, no background of any kind, and no masonry, to speak of, in the auditorium. A close reproduction of an early Æschylean theatre, as modern scholarship reveals it, would probably amaze and almost scandalize many educated middle-aged people by confronting them with much caked earth, a little ramshackle woodwork, some canvas tenting, and little else, cer-

tainly none of the miracles of architecture, painting and engineering fondly imagined by the best text-books before the Germans began digging. Mr. Benson gave, as you might say, a compromise between the Oxford scholarship of thirty years ago and an expert manager's sense of the impracticability of its theories. There were two stages, but they were only three feet different in level; there were ladders between, but they were broad ladders, of gentle gradient.

Then, as to that second point—how far the performance threw light upon what might perhaps have been felt by a play-going Greek—one could really not say. The common classical education bids you believe that the Greeks in a theatre used to be stirred by some unanalysed mixture of devotional delight in a fine piece of ritual, sporting delight in a competition of skill, and pure play-goer's delight in the exercise of a quickened imagination on an absorbing train of credible human experiences. If the Stratford performance threw light on this subject at all, it was chiefly by way of making you feel that neither the religious nor the sporting interest can have been needed to make an Æschylean trilogy engrossing; trilogy one says, because this night was to many of us a revelation of the dramatic values of the trilogy as distinct from the single play. Imagine what it would be to see

"Macbeth" or "Othello" acted whole for the first time, after having never seen more than a detached act or two played before. It was like that. And the second play of the three gained most. In the "Furies" there were moments when the prolixity and sententiousness of the avengers somewhat loosened the tragedy's hold on the audience. But in the "Libation-bearers" there seemed at every turn to be some phrase or movement which the fresh presence of the "Agamemnon" to the mind rendered iridescent with a new irony. And the sheer theatrical value of the method of Orestes' return and of the sight of him forcing his mother backward by the throat nto the execution chamber was to most of us pure discovery.

A thing not easily to be spoilt for you in Stratford is the way you go to the theatre there, at any rate on a fine evening in late April, in a year when the spring has not been soured by an ill-placed frost. You may stay at a half-timbered inn with many gables, and eat and sleep in rooms raftered with oak that probably came from the Forest of Arden. From the inn you have only to walk twice the length of a college quadrangle. Of the Memorial Theatre itself—that is, of its outside –

charity will say little. How the vision both of its form and its colour came to afflict a single mind—however, as fire from Heaven has not yet smitten it, let not man judge. Anyhow, you go into it from a garden by a river, alive just now with little jocund noises: there is that sound which to hear is like drinking cool water in summer—the dip of oars and the little tinkle of laughter from people coming home in boats at twilight; beyond the stream some lambs are leaping about in a meadow of juicy grass, or posting back to their mothers in sudden thirst. Wherever you look, behold! it is very good. Behind you the little ordered country town is in the oddly gay mixed light of lamps early lit and of the lengthening daylight; in front, beyond the lambs, the fields rise and fall softly till they go out of sight, the quintessence of the contained and friendly English Midland landscape. When these things have possessed your soul with content, you go through a door and see, it may be, "As You Like It" acted by artists on whom they are working too — at any rate, you think so. The audience, on the whole, is picked and fit, for there is no mere fashion of coming here, to bring many quite vacuous spectators; no one comes who does not care for plays or acting; people laugh at the right place in comedy; the space between them and the actors

is not the non-conductor of emotion that it often seems to be elsewhere; it quivers with communicative quickness; you do not have a sense that artist's intention and public's perception are fumbling for each other in a dark room; you feel the stir of a common intellectual excitement changing all the hard disparate atoms in the auditorium into one quickened brain whose joint apprehension is not, as in most theatres, the apprehension of the dullest, but that of the eager and clear, the ones with speculation in their eyes. What dead silence receives, in most theatres, Le Beau's discreet civility—

"Hereafter, in a better world than this,
I shall desire more love and knowledge of you!"

It is not, or was not, so at Stratford; you feel a whole audience to be delightedly tasting flavours and valuing qualities in what they hear.

After an act you step out into the more than pastoral quietude of a country town settling to rest after the day. The growth of stillness, since you went in, is measured for you by the new clearness of little distant sounds, voices at far-off cottage doors, or the shouts of a few children late at their play in the meadows. When the play ends, outside there is white river mist and dead silence. You all go to bed like one household. Half an

hour after the Oresteia was done there was not a sound in the High Street ; at midnight the footsteps of two belated actors and their voices at the corner as they said good night rang like a sound in midnight Oxford.

Mr. Masefield's Tragedies

LIKE most fine original plays Mr. Masefield's "Nan" is of good family; it comes of the stock of Elizabethan pastoral tragedy and has a coarse ancestor in the pseudo-Shakspere's "Yorkshire Tragedy," and a noble one in the close of "King John," where the King dies poisoned in an orchard. Mr. Masefield sets his tragedy in one of those Hesperidean counties of Western England where windfallen apples float whole sunny afternoons in the lazy pools above mill-dams. Scarcely can one think of any place more helpful to the contrast sought by pastoral tragedy between the momentary poignancy of its own action and the perennial peace and geniality of a framing outward world—a contrast always to be distinguished from the ones attempted in the blood-boltered plays of D'Annunzio, who likes to set his clotted horrors off by juxtaposition to some hot, heavy-scented loveliness, a kind of greenhouse tragedy that shows you how different blood may look when splashed

on orchids and on bracken. Mr. Masefield's landscape, too, is no mere dab of local colour in stage directions; it possesses the minds of his chief characters as the sea possesses Synge's people in "Riders to the Sea," and the hill-pastures in "The Shadow of the Glen," so that, the more impassioned they are, the more naturally do they talk of it, as people brought up to church-going begin to interject about God when much moved. Like a good Elizabethan play, "Nan" is full of choice landscape-painting done through the speeches—the kind of thing Shakspere was always at, with his russet dawns and misty dawns, and thickening twilights, and nights on which the darkness seems to grope and "pore" in space, like smoke filling a vessel. Such beauties have their difficulty for the post-Elizabethan scene-painter. Good scene-painting may be very beautiful too, but the two ways of giving background do not live well together. Mr. Hawes Craven's dawns for "Romeo and Juliet" either slay Shakspere's or are slain by them; and, whatever the reason, one's imagination cannot fully put itself forth on Mr. Masefield's Gloucestershire orchards and owl-haunted woods in presence of concurrent endeavours to realize these things in canvas and paint.

Like Synge, again, Mr. Masefield has a profound but unsentimental sympathy with his rustics;

he studies peasant cruelty without either raging at it or idealizing it into something else, and he works it into his picture without brutalizing the picture's effect as a whole. He has also something of Synge's skill in picking the strange little concrete details which give description vividness, like Nan's imagination of her drowned body "knockin' agen the bridges," and something of Synge's wise wildness of figurative speech in passages of passion; and he has an ear for the rhythms of the living voice — he neither gives to simple people strings of lumpish polysyllables to mouth, nor the bastard semi-metrical stuff in which half our dramatists, when attempting scenes of emotional intensity, ape the maudlin whine of fiddle-strings that usually supports them on such occasions. And within the bounds of likeness to life he has found a manner of writing drama wholly his own. His dialogue is in a prose mainly of short, detached sentences, often merely interjectional, each contributing to the whole speech of which it forms part an idea or image complete and vivid in itself, like the many separate spots or wafers of pure colour which the French *pointillistes* juxtapose on their canvas, believing that to divide Nature's masses of mixed colour into their chromatic components and leave them to mingle again on our retina, while we look at the picture, is really the likeliest way to excite

our visual nerves as the compounded colour did in Nature. If you first read in print a passage like the description of the "bore" in the Severn—

"For first there come a-wammerin' and a-wammerin'. Miles away that wammerin' be. In the sea. The shipmen do cross theirselves. And it come up. It come nearer. Wammerin'! Wammerin'! 'Ush, it says. 'Ush, it says. 'Ush, it says. And there come a girt wash of it over a rock. White. White. Like a bird. Like a swan a-gettin' up out of the pool,"

and, again—

"The tide'll sweep them away. O, I've known it. It takes the nets up miles. Miles. They find 'em high up. Beyond Glorster. Beyond 'Artbury. Girt golden flag-flowers over 'em. And apple-trees a-growin' over them. Apples of red and apples of gold. They fall into the water. The water be still there, where the apples fall. The nets 'ave apples in them"

—your feeling may be partly one of irritation at the bumpiness suggested by these long, rapid sequences of full stops; but when they are rightly delivered by actors you find that there is no ungainliness or jolt about them. Spoken at the right heat, speeches of this kind fall into a

new and beautiful unity of significance, as those "impressionist" pictures do when you look from the right distance and the crude chromatic enigma transforms itself into a wonder of faithful expressiveness. One need not try to settle whether it is *the* way to do the thing or not.

"There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right."

So are all the known ways of writing and punctuating dramatic dialogue right so long as they stir us and smell of the breath and do not seem inky.

One may have a little misgiving lest Mr. Masefield have let a little taint of "literariness" creep into his dialogue now and again; for example, where Nan says that she "was a fly in the spider's web, and the web came round me and round me till it was a shroud." Such passages leave you hesitating. Was Mr. Masefield, the man of letters, planting upon Nan some accepted literary imagery? or was Mr. Masefield, the observer of life, seeking to convey the special quality of pathos that comes when an untaught mind, striving for fuller self-expression in a moment of exaltation, lays hands on some old flower of speech cast off by the more affluent? But the beauty of the play as a whole,

and especially of its central character, is wonderful. Nan is a tragic figure of the order of Mr. Hardy's Tess. Her natural incapacity for suspicion, her blindness to her lover's poorness of spirit, her own frank sanity of instinct, her gallant lavishness in affection, the touch of grandeur in her revenge, which to her is no mere wreaking of a private hate, but the rescue of other women from her own griefs —all this is unsurpassable. She stands out white and columnar from among the creeping things of the dark place she moves in. Her first confidence to Jenny, the beautiful scene of her surrender to Dick, and her final denunciation of the traitor, are splendidly imagined. This Dick Gurvil, the recreant lover, is a dialect version of a fairly familiar general type of character—the connoisseur in pleasure, the voluptuary, not as glutton, but as epicure and analyst of sensations. Irving was so fascinated by the idea of this type that he even tried to graft something of it on Macbeth ; Stevenson often toyed with it ; Wilde for a long time seemed to have thought out no other. The philosophy on which (with some misunderstanding) it founds itself is to be read in that famous last chapter of the "Renaissance," which Pater left out of a second edition, lest it should "mislead some young men."

One shuddered to hear that "Nan" was to be

followed by a play about Pompey and other Romans. You remember the painful sensation created at dinner among the boys at Dr. Blimber's academy by a conversational mention of "this terrible people, their implacable enemies." Thus does the experienced playgoer blench at a classical title for a new play. But Mr. Masefield's "Tragedy of Pompey the Great" has a classical theme without the ills that often attend one—neither pedantry nor illiteracy, neither the common attempt to be an Elizabethan and to have read only Plutarch's "Lives," nor the obviously conscious attempt to beat the record, as Becker's inanimate "Gallus" did in its time, in copiousness of reconstructive scholarship. Mr. Masefield uses the same prose as he did for his English pastoral tragedies. And, again, he shows himself unsurpassed by anyone now writing in a kind of sure suddenness of imagery. Mental images to most people are very sudden things, but in literature you generally see them coming—at least, you see the author making ready to work the flashlight. Mr. Masefield has the power that Meredith valued of "springing your imagination with a word," or with two or three, as the big lyric writers do with their odd recondite simplicities and brevities. Of his own lyrics there is a beautiful specimen in the epilogue to this play:

"And all their passionate hearts are dust,
And dust the great idea that burned
In various flames of love and lust,
Till the world's brain was turned.

"God, moving darkly in men's brains,
Using their passions as His tool,
Brings freedom with a tyrant's chains
And wisdom with the fool.

"Blindly and bloodily we drift,
Our interests clog our hearts with dreams.
God make my brooding soul a rift
Through which a meaning gleams."

Mr. Masefield's Pompey is ennobled to a height that may scandalize the multitude of persons on whom the confident eloquence of Mommsen's famous portrait has imposed itself at first, second, or later hand. Historical reputations are sadly at the mercy of eloquent people, and, whether we know much or little of Roman history, it is difficult to drive out of the mind that picture of the semi-capable, semi-exalted, ineffectual man whose "life passed joylessly away in a perpetual inward contradiction." The Pompey of Mr. Masefield's tragedy has no limit to his military genius and efficiency but that which is imposed by his moral splendour. He tries to eliminate from war the mere "butcher's business" element, the "pomp and circumstance" element, the elements of fashionable

adventure and jobbery, the element of sentimental virilism, the element of unknightly "slimness," the element of militarist caste insolence, the element of indifference to the real nature of war as a means to its own supersession—all the dross and gush and fustian, in fact. This Pompey tackles the problem of conduct with the deadly directness and clearness of a St. Francis, and his career, like that of a St. Francis, re-illustrates the fact that the rewards of moral achievement are themselves moral, and that, from any but the purely moral point of view, they may look like signal failures. The play probably affects some readers with an impression of undeserved and enigmatic calamity because it is difficult to disengage oneself from the idea that the natural reward of supreme virtue is something material and external—the fond Old Testament idea displaced by Christianity—"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Mr. Masefield's Pompey is deserted by his lieutenants; he loses battles; he fails to defend Rome from Cæsar; and he is humiliated and murdered; but it is a quite tenable view that his career is one of unbroken moral success and of ample moral rewards. It all depends on how you define your terms, and whether you keep things separate which people sometimes muddle together so as to keep

themselves off disquieting lines of thought. Anyhow, this Pompey is a figure nobly conceived and wrought, and fit to range with the great heroine of Mr. Masefield's earlier tragedy.

Good and Bad Subjects for Plays

A SUBJECT for drama may be good or bad either absolutely or relatively to audiences of a certain date or in certain places. It is bad absolutely if there be something in the necessary conditions of all stage representation which makes that subject hard to present, as the necessary conditions of sculpture make mists and sunsets and complexions hard for a sculptor to express, and as the necessary conditions of painting make it hard for painters to express wide and unbroken expanses of sunned snow.

Again, within each of these categories of unsuitableness for the stage, there are degrees. Perhaps the supreme degree of absolute unfitness is reached by such a theme as the loves of deaf mutes, which preclude dialogue where most is asked of it. A lesser degree of absolute unfitness is seen in plots which consist in flights and pursuits, like the plot of "Quentin Durward" and the plot of Stevenson's "Kidnapped," because the stage

cannot present a long pursuit directly ; it can only give you picked moments of it, or reports of it at second-hand, not the continuous course of the chase, as a novelist can. So, too, of badness relative to a certain audience there are degrees ranging from the unfitness of "Henry VI." to be played before an audience of French Catholics down to the unfitness (noticed by Irving at the Lyceum) of any kind of sombre tragedy to be played before a London middle-class audience during a time of severe depression in the money-market. Of course one must be careful to distinguish the "absolute" and "relative" badness in question from "complete" and "partial" badness. "Absolute" badness may be present in quite small measure; "relative" badness may be present in such abundance as to make a play impossible. In the subject of Synge's "Playboy of the Western World," a play of genius, with no "absolute" badness of any kind about it, there was at a certain time and place so much badness, relatively to certain sentiments current in its hearers, that there was a riot in the theatre.

As between one moral quality and another, there is a good instance of difference in degree of aptness to the stage in Sir Arthur Pinero's play, "His House in Order." Nina in the play is a gallant young volcano, in eruption for an act and a half,

until damped out with floods of talk about renunciation and haloes. She is acted by Miss Irene Vanbrugh, the best of English actresses at expressing the kind of salt, sane, wayward honesty of ill-will and generosity that jumps in a semi-calculable way up and down the whole scale of equity and magnanimity, from uncompromisingly Mosaic doctrines of an eye for an eye to super-Christian feats of self-immolation. You may first think that as Nina she does the Old Testament ethics the better of the two; then you may go on to think that the author has done them vastly better, then you reflect that he could hardly have failed to. For the whole spirit of retaliatory justice, with its set contrasts and its spirit of pat, triumphant repartee, becomes the stuff of drama much more easily than the mild, blond sort of moral beauty that answereth not again. The code of tit-for-tat is a fine spring of vivacity in rapid speech; the turning of the other cheek has grandeur, even epigram—it may be the most silencing of rejoinders, but not of dramatic rejoinders, for there you want nobody permanently silenced; you want not only a conflict of wills but a conflict of talk, for talk is of the essence of drama, and the less a virtue or a vice runs naturally to free and pointed speech, the less fit material is it for the stage.

Among vices, lying is a good one for stage pur-

poses. With its brisk and obvious immediate effects of stuck or puzzled faces, of action at cross purposes, the gravelling of A, the palpable bewilderment of B, the staggering horror or shame of C, it is just the quality to be played with by the one art that attempts mixed visible and audible effects. Ralph Roister-Doister found out, Falstaff cornered after the affair of Gadshill, Goldsmith's Lofty confronted with the great man of whose friendship he had boasted—these are typically theatrical as opposed to narrative achievements, because their full value depends on their being seen as well as heard. The looks of them are half the sport; it is a fun essentially visual and spectacular, unlike the pleasure of tracing the ravages of the comic malady of Meredith's Egoist, a thing of delicate sinuosities and minute internal crepitations, which does not work itself out on the patient's face in such abrupt, grotesque changes as set theatres in a roar. Mr. H. A. Jones, in his "Liars," follows the best and oldest examples—better still, he tries to play the old game in a new way of his own. The old way was to have all the lying done by one person, to make one character the personification of untruthfulness and keep him lying steadily throughout, confounding many and at last himself confounded. Such is the liar's progress of Dorante in Corneille's "Le Menteur,"

and such the adventures and discomfiture of Young Bookwit in Steele's "Lying Lover," perhaps the most distinguished liar, of the first order of industry, on the English stage.

We should have fine illustrations of relative unfitness for drama if some one—some German, if no one in England knows enough English plays—would write a book on the widening of the scope of pity on the stage, the change that has knocked one human infirmity after another out of the list of things that are fair game and put them on the list of things that are past a joke. He might start, say, with the case of blindness, and trace the change down from the typical handling of the blind man in the mystery plays, half butt and half buffoon, to the more compassionate treatment of blindness in Shakspere's Gloucester, and on to its sentimental treatment in Scribe's "Valèrie." Or our student might take insanity first, and show the growth of the playgoing public's compunctiousness since the thirteenth century, when the "fool" used for "comic relief" in England and France was often no professional in motley but a genuine idiot or maniac, valued for the absurdity of his antics and gibberish. Perhaps the Elizabethans, with their humanely conceived Ophelias and Lears, would again supply a middle term in the series that has ended in our own ultra-sensitive

and super-sympathetic feeling that insanity is almost too painful for the theatre to touch at all, even with the gentlest hand.

In this stream of tendency, as in other streams, the current does not run equally fast over the whole width of its bed. If we have lost zest for making fun of blindness, we cling pretty tightly, in farce, to the humours of deafness. Surrendering the comic possibilities of lunacy, we cherish those of wooden legs. Least of all have we made way towards giving up one of the most cruel of stock gibes, the gibe at the woman who is in love, or wishes to be loved, but is plain or fading. For the ugly man who is in love the theatre has come to have some movings of pity. Banville asked our sympathy for Gringoire's efforts to surmount the drawbacks of his appearance, even before M. Rostand wrote, in "Cyrano," the first full, three-decked tragedy of male love baulked by ill-looks. But to the amorous woman, who is not lucky enough to be beautiful, too, the stage's regular attitude is that of the Elizabethan to the baited bear. Sir William Gilbert, in "Patience," made a kind of frontal attack, with all the horse, foot and artillery of jocosity, on the lady who grows stout and whose hair grows thin. The chief source of fun in Messrs. Fenn and Price's "Saturday to Monday" is the ingenuity of a sprightly peer who

first makes mock proposals of marriage to three ladies not qualified by adequate beauty to obtain the sympathy of us fine chivalrous fellows in the stalls, and then shunts them on to a secondary line, or siding, of delusion by pretending that he was wooing them on behalf of his private secretary. One of them, an elderly widow, is a kind of modern version of Congreve's Lady Wishfort in "The Way of the World," and the play makes one feel how slow we proud moderns should be to say the usual hard things about the Restoration drama, "where no love is," as Thackeray says. For nearly everybody in the theatre clearly enjoys the baiting of these too susceptible ladies, though Messrs. Fenn and Price do it without genius—father, geometrically, exhausting the mathematical possibilities of fun on somewhat obvious principles.

Our distinction between absolute and relative intractableness is hard to keep up in the case of dramatic material which the changing physical conditions of the stage have affected for better or worse. Here is an illustration. With Ibsen's aid, certain physical changes—chiefly the withdrawal of the whole stage to within the line of the proscenium arch, and perhaps the introduction of electric lighting—have almost banished from the heatre the explanatory soliloquy and the voluble aside. Thus a new difficulty plagues the modern

treatment of some cases of secret villainy and hypocrisy and of furtive impulse—say, the case of a theft of jewels by a social equal and fellow-guest. The plot of "Mrs. Gorringe's Necklace" turns on such a theft, and, in order to give the audience the thief's side of the matter, Mr. Davies has to—or at least does—make his thief soliloquize freely ("O Lord, I repent," "I can restore it now, while they're at dinner," etc.) because the thief cannot plausibly talk about it to anyone else. And, though this was all very well when Congreve, for similar reasons, threw a large portion of his "Double Dealer" into soliloquy, it chills or disillusions the ears of many modern playgoers, who have been led to feel almost all soliloquy to be unnatural and a breakdown of skill in the dramatist. That the unmanageableness of the sly vices without such aids is not complete is proved by Molière, who does not avail himself of them in order to show us the whole of Tartuffe, inside and out. But Molière's technics approach miracle, and so far as stolen-necklace plots drive a more than ordinarily skilful modern dramatist into conventions that are obsolete in a modern playhouse, so far may it be argued that stolen-necklace plots have deteriorated as material for drama.

A more sweeping disqualification than any of these is demanded by Mr. Yeats. He would

strike off as not fit for drama the stronger emotions of educated and well-bred modern people, because it is not now the fashion for such people to speak out; "when they are deeply moved they look silently into the fireplace." Mr. Yeats finds himself repelled, in plays of passion in contemporary life, at finding the hero "gushing, sentimental, and quite without ideas," and is inclined to accept it as a necessity that the hero "cannot be well-bred or self-possessed or intellectual, for if he were he would draw a chair to the fire, and there would be no duologue at the end of the third act."

For the moment one is struck with terror at seeing ruled out by so good an authority a wide world of topics that seem to some of us choicely good. But there comes relief; for, after all, is not Mr. Yeats only raising, in a new form, the old objection, so often raised, so often answered, against the use of any convention, any departure from naturalism, in dramatic speech. Well-conditioned people do not, perhaps, quite let themselves go as much as they might when emotion shakes them; they make few set speeches; they head off eloquence if they come near it. But then impassivity was nearly always an aristocratic tradition; at any rate, knightly and courtly people never used to speak blank verse, much less rhymed couplets, when deeply moved; least of all did they

sing them, like Tristan and Tannhäuser. When we feel that a modern hero is gushing and ranting, it may mean that the dramatist or the actor is bungling the transposition from the natural reticence of life to the necessary expressiveness of art, and not that the transposition should not be made. Had the thing been well done Mr. Yeats might have felt that the modern man's form of breeding and self-possession was being conveyed, and yet that his passion was being conveyed as well. The censure of modern manners as unadapted for drama seems much as if one were to strike romantic legend out of the list of meet subjects for heroic verse, on the ground that boys writing prize poems had vulgarized some such subjects with their own bombast. Still, whatever Mr. Yeats says about the theatre should be weighed more than once, for, even if its most obvious meaning be unsound, it may have another worth noting.

A kindred contention is that life has lost fatally much of its excellence as dramatic material because it is less "simple" than it was, because it used to consist more in strong action and large, deep-cut passion and its immediate and violent expression. "Those things," a character of Mr. Henry James's is made to say, "could be put upon the playhouse boards with comparatively little sacrifice of their completeness and their truth. To day we're so

infinitely more reflective and complicated and diffuse that it makes all the difference. What can you do with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them!" We moderns have a kind of self-love that likes to dwell on the tremendous and unprecedented intricacy and subtlety of our moods and sensations with a kind of doating despair of doing justice to them; but one would hope that art has been growing subtler, too. If a critic of cricket considered modern bowling alone he might have similar raptures of despondency over the possibility of humanity's playing it—its elusiveness, its complications, its rapidity. Then, turning to consider modern batting, he would find that its counter-advance in subtlety and resource has been still greater. A modern woman of passion may perhaps be more reflective, complicated, and diffuse than Shakspere's Cleopatra; but then the modern woman of passion is played by Sarah Bernhardt or Mrs. Patrick Campbell, and not by a boy.

Besides real and grounded, or weightily argued, unfitness for the stage, there is a kind of vulgar false repute of unfitness that deprives the theatre of many excellent subjects. It is believed on hearsay by many people that plays ought to be

about something which has as little as possible to do with themselves, or which is no longer interesting in itself, such as the ravages of unlawful love in strange, dull families, or improbable and unpiquant scandals about Queen Elizabeth, or self-conscious rough heroism of the Bret Harte kind, fussily virile, swaggeringly humble-hearted, dressed up to the nines in homely simplicity. The novelists, or those of them that have the brains, long ago quitted these avenues to tedium; they opened out new ranges of topic, all alive and some of them violently kicking; they wrote like Peace Societies and Primrose Leagues: they applied the solvents and caustics of art to gambles in wheat; they took the side of the angels, or the other side, in the unlearned affrays that went on at the same time as the first serious discussion of the evolution theory. Perhaps it is one of the reasons why the English stage has gone down and the English novel gone up.

That our plays ought not to take sides in politics or other questions of the day is one of the things that some people daily say, not knowing what they say, nor trying to know. Some plays ought to and others ought not. It depends upon what makes their authors write best, the advocate's heat or the bystander's curiosity. Sir Arthur Pinero probably writes the better the more com-

pletely he dismisses from his mind his reputed aversion to trade unions. M. Brieux seems to write his best when he is burning to improve the French judicial system, or to discountenance the employment of wet-nurses by the inhabitants of Paris. There has been, in recent years, at least one quite good anti-Semite play in France, and, though anti-Semitism is quite a bad thing, one does not see why a Jew, with a sound critical temperament, should not derive agreeable æsthetic sensations from the play, while desiring, on other grounds, to see its author off to New Caledonia. Certainly many unimpeachable Unionists have been seen enjoying Mr. Yeats's Irish rebel play of "Kathleen ni Houlihan" with a suspension of political wrath which did credit to their skill as playgoers, and if some one should write a good Mystery to the honour and glory of the Church Schools Emergency League, or a Morality reflecting on the last Licensing Bill, Liberals, no doubt, would bear up and enjoy themselves.

One grisly lion straddles across the path of this enlarged drama. The Examiner of Plays is said to regard politics, like religion and Biblical history, as one of the kinds of pitch that his tender charge, the drama, cannot touch without being defiled. But, without absolutely trespassing on the contents of the King's Speech, the dramatists might find

succulent pasture in such secondary matters as are said to be "uncontentious" because they rend parties internally rather than part them farther from each other. One's mind figures five poignant acts upon the currency, complicated perhaps with a tragedy of the heart—the widening gulf between the monometallic wife, staunch daughter of a line of monometallists, and the husband who loses the common faith of their youth in the single standard, each of them torn between affection for the other and horror of a life of error for their only child, hitherto trained to disdain the white metal—and, at the end, all these discords reconciled in the higher harmony of a joint concentration on paper, or cowries, as the perfect medium of exchange. Sagacious novelists have popularized spiritual trouble; what was long regarded as the annoyance of a few picked souls has been converted, on a sound commercial basis, into the recreation of countless nice young persons in Britain and America. Why not do as much for the Indian Budget? As Hamlet argues, nothing is light or stodgy but thinking makes it so. We are told that the function of art is to make us love what we have tried a hundred times before and found dull each time. Will no dramatic artist make us love the Civil Service Estimates?

The Art of Mr. Poel

HEARING "Samson Agonistes" played in the new great hall of the University of Manchester, in the twilight and first darkness of a December evening, a new pleasure possessed you. One seemed to be in at the birth of a thing that some day might be valued for ancientry. Great buildings are furnished in that way, in youth, with treasures for their old age: the resonance does not die out; and to-day, in the Hall of the Middle Temple, it is part of a diner's pleasure that "Twelfth Night" was first acted there, and Shakspere's voice, it may well be, rang in the rafters you sit under. Old fiddles, people say, keep in them something of all the music that ever was made on them. So may old rooms. The paintings that hang in them sucked in the light, one century after another, to hoard up the lustre you see; it seems as if timber and glass, like oil paint, must have their physical memory of all the waves of sound that have broken upon them. At least, it is easily fancied. In Christ Church Hall or

the Hall of Gray's Inn imagination does not need much stirring to feel the Holbeins giving out rays saved on days of Tudor sunshine, or the panels echoing more genially, when people laugh, for some unspent vibrations from the first-night mirth about "The Comedy of Errors." All new great halls, you may feel, ought to be stored in that way, in good time, that when they are old, and their builders long dead, they may light imagination in the eager minds of people then young, like some cathedrals where, to be heard, the organ scarcely needs to be played, or those rooms of pictures where, on the wettest English day, Venetian or Florentine sunlight does not fail.

Then came other pleasures—these also, perhaps, not strictly pleasures of the theatre. In a play that is good as a play your eye and ear together are kept in a state of expectancy constantly piqued and then satisfied, repiqued and resatisfied. Sir Arthur Pinero will keep your mind craning, on tip-toe, for hours to know what will A say to this, what will B do on hearing of that, what dress will C wear when next she comes in, and how will D act when he sees it. "Samson" does not keep you asking these questions and taking in savoursome answers. Nor, surely, did Milton study Greek playcraft as he studied Greek poetry, or he would have felt one difference grievous that there is between "Sam-

son" and a good Greek play. The long narrative speech is, it is true, characteristic of Greek tragedy, but even more characteristic of it is the long bout of one-line dialogue, where speech clicks in on speech, as foil on foil, so pat and nervous as almost to outpace the fencing rhymes of French comedy. Can Milton have consciously thought that he alone among playwrights on the Greek model could keep an audience animated and expectant without any of these rallies of volleying at the net? Certainly "Samson," Chorus and all, is made almost wholly of such mighty allocutions as French actors call generically *récits de Théramène*, in honour of the vasty specimen entrusted to that person in the "Phèdre" of Racine. They are magnificent, but not drama. An apt ear, of course, is kept happy, merely by the august loveliness of the verse; a reader's mind may find extrinsic poignancy in the poem as a "last sunset cry" of Milton's wounded spirit; but the eye, the playgoer's change-seeking and incident-loving eye, is apt to have poor sport of it among these wide expanses of still rhetoric, in which the one shrewd touch of stage-craft, the finely announced entry of Dalila, shines like a good deed in a naughty world. Here, to the vacant eye's rescue, came in the genius of Mr. William Poel, the master of this revel.

Mr. Poel began by planting the whole visible action of the play not on the horizontal plane —the floor of the stage—but on the vertical plane —its back wall. He built up this back wall into something like the semi-circular tribuna at the east end of an early Christian basilica ; travellers in Italy will remember one in the cathedral at Torcello, with the priests' seats rising in steps, tier above tier, culminating in the bishop's throne at the top in the middle. In the seat corresponding to this episcopal throne Mr. Poel planted Samson for almost the whole time that he was on the stage. The remaining characters were repeatedly grouped and regrouped so as, in the aggregate, to present a triangular mass of colour, receding and tapering as it rose, like one side of a pyramid. Thus, in an early group, Samson was at the apex of this pyramid, one of its bounding lines was formed by the Chorus, and the other marked out by Dalila in the middle of the line and by her attendants at its base. At her exit the composition of the picture dissolved for a few moments ; the Chorus gesticulated, huddled, swarmed, and then, like swallows re-perching after a moment's scare, resumed their place in the pyramidal formation, Harapha and his followers now forming the other side line of the triangle, precisely as Dalila and hers had done. Again the compo-

sition melted away for some minutes; the Chorus declaimed and pattered, twittered and crooned and keened, and then it settled again as before, with the Public Officers in Harapha's and Dalila's place, and his guard of soldiers in that of their attendants.

In each of these groupings Samson was seen full length, his feet higher than the head of the person next below, and this person in turn was seen, clear from head to foot, above the group below; and this mode of presentation was singularly pleasing to the eye, for reasons not explicable here, but good enough, as it would seem, to have made Raphael adopt it almost exactly, steps and all, in the so-called "School of Athens," and in the "Incendio del Borgo" at the Vatican. And not Raphael only; the pyramidal formation is perhaps the most familiar of all beautiful patterns of pictorial grouping; it is the pattern of the Ansidei Madonna in the National Gallery, and of the Giorgione altar-piece at Castelfranco; and two or three times in the playing of "Samson" the design of this last painting was recalled by a grouping of the three persons forming for the moment the apex of the larger pyramid— Samson at the top, his green-clad attendant below him on his right, where St. Liberalis is in the picture, and Manoa or Dalila in the place of St. Francis. We are not in Mr. Poel's

secrets, but to an uninformed spectator it looked as if he had had every one of his groupings painted to a finish in his mind and then transferred it touch by touch to its place on the purple background, all under the strong influence of Italian medieval and Renaissance theories of pictorial design. Whatever the words that were spoken, it would have been good to sit for two hours and stare at the spectacles painted upon the end wall of the hall. Their colour was choice; they had line and structure enough for cathedrals. Not strict playgoing, perhaps, all this, but quite strict pleasure; the playgoing eye was at least triumphantly pacified.

There was a famous medley of dresses—Samson's attendant in something quite Greek, Dalila, we believe, in the best clothes of a Cretan lady—we know not of what date; the soldiers in Roman uniform; Harapha in something barbarian, and so on. No doubt the aim was to represent the way in which the seventeenth century might probably have dressed the play, had it played it at all—that is, without the faintest interest in our modern hobbies of local colour and general exactitude in unessentials. Anyhow, for this or some other good reason, Mr. Poel gave himself a fine free hand in colour for his pictures. The united wardrobes of the Greeks, the Romans, the Cretans, and the

Germans or Scandinavians afford, between them, a liberal palette for studies in Philistian *genre*, and handsomely he used it.

The same resources were used, to a slightly different end, when Mr. Poel put upon a stage the fifteenth-century Morality of "Everyman." To see what his task in this was, you have to tell yourself first what the place of "Everyman" was in the life of the stage. When the Roman theatre, heir to the Greek, had gone to the bad and then died, there came a long, blank gap. By the year A.D. 500 plays were no longer being written or acted in Europe. Six hundred years later the stage was being rediscovered. It was no mere taking up of a dropped thread; it was a re-invention of an old invention long lost. The Greek drama had been born in church, and our modern drama was born there too. The germ of it was, perhaps, this: After Mass on an eleventh-century saint's day three priests would put on albs and give the people a *tableau vivant* of the three Maries announcing the Resurrection to the disciples. To-day it would be called a "P.S.A. Movement." It drew crowds, and to keep them songs were added and lengthening pieces of dialogue, and the whole Bible was searched for subjects. Then the church became

too small for the congregation, and the stage had to be moved into the churchyard, and then into some roomy field outside, and then into the market-place. There, as a Church institution, it died of its success. Priests could not gad about the streets acting; laymen had to do it. But most laymen did not know Latin, so Latin was given up for English; new subjects, not drawn straight from the Bible, came in—the strife of good and evil in the mind, the pleasant exterior and disappointing interior of vice, the snares of the world for young men, the discomfiture of hypocrites, at last even of clerical hypocrites. As the thing grew, actors became professional, theatres permanent, performances continuous. Finally, at the Renaissance, there burst in on this raw, half-grown theatre, as it existed in England, the whole flood of artistic influences, of stored-up achievement and experience, that had been frozen in and unavailable throughout the Middle Ages. The gifted, vigorous, bungling native drama bound itself apprentice to Plautus and produced "Ralph Roister Doister," to Seneca and produced "Gorboduc," till Marlowe and Shakspere came to unite in the Elizabethan theatre all that was alive in the raw native drama with all that the revival of learning had yet shown to be worth copying from classical models. Now "Everyman's" historical interest is this; it is the

best piece surviving in English from the time when the reborn stage had generally passed from the hands of priests to those of trade guilds, had dropped Latin for English, and had gone beyond the Bible for its characters, but had not yet come into its estate as heir of the Greek and Roman theatres. "Everyman" is of the Middle Ages.

One might be hard set to define the medieval spirit, but Mr. Poel and his friends had not been playing "Everyman" for many minutes before you felt that your mind was being adroitly filled with reminiscences of everything that at other times had brought it nearest to late medieval ways of looking at life and death—reminiscences mainly Italian. The Messenger who spoke the Prologue was a study in the ascetic's waxlike anticipation, in living flesh, of that fine austerity of death which is perhaps most fully expressed by another art in the sculptured tombs on the floor of Santa Croce at Florence. The decoration of the canopied recess from which God spoke the opening lines was a typical landscape background of Giovanni Bellini, with topped trees and a distance of mountains. The angel sitting on the steps was in every detail, if memory did not mislead us, the angel of Botticelli's "Tobit." Everyman, in his grave-clothes, seemed to come straight from the "Last Judgment" of Orcagna, where the grave is giving up its dead;

the figure of Confession was, to the life, one of the blithely angelic monks who look so much like happy, serious, pretty and good children, with tonsures, on tombs sculptured by Mino da Fiesole. All out of place, somebody might say, in acting an English play ascribed by some to the early fifteenth century, and not placed later than that century's end by anyone fitted to judge. In one sense—a narrow one—yes, but not in another. Most of those English people whose imaginations have conceived with any energy the frames of mind that distinguish the later Middle Ages have come at this through Italy, at Florence, Assisi, Padua, Venice; and what are dozens of anachronisms so long as one is helped to come as near as one's ignorance permits to a right mood for listening to a play?

In such a case "the right mood" does not necessarily mean the mood of an audience of the play's own date. It is too clear that the ordinary medieval audience listening to Moralities, and even to mysteries, with their more official sacredness, was not as their authors would have had it. Their extant texts are like gramophones, in which the chatter of the medieval playgoer is preserved, or, rather, a kind of "negative" or death-mask of it—the correlative entreaties of the actors for a little silence. "Doulces gens, un pou de silence!"

"Nun schweiget still!" "Each man has but his own tongue to hold!" From all the medieval stage of Europe there rose the polyglot entreaty to the public to be quiet. One of the Towneley Mysteries opens with Pilate bawling for silence in the name of the devil and of Mahomet's blood. Jörg Wickram of Colmar craftily begins his "God-fearing Tobias" by putting on the stage a messenger from Lucifer to ask those present to interrupt and misbehave, and the messenger will take down for his master the names of those who misbehave the best. Beside browbeating and threatening, the medieval dramatists would give their restless audiences enormous and unseemly bribes of comic digression. The executioners in the Towneley Mysteries jest lengthily over the nailing of Christ to the cross, and Pilate, in a scene of low comedy, cheats them at dice for Christ's coat. Blind and halt men, miraculously restored, complain comically of the loss of their easy livelihood as beggars. Perhaps our inveterate English habit of mixing "comic relief" with tragedy—a habit that has given scandal to all the bigwigs of classical tradition from Ben Jonson to Sarcey—took its rise in the medieval practice of bringing in a supposed madman to rave or drivel for some minutes in the middle of a Nativity or Passion play, in order to put the audience into enough good humour to tide

them over the serious part safely. As a whole, a medieval audience at a Mystery or a Morality performance seems to have been rather like a young child in church—half awed, half bored, wholly uncritical, sometimes frightened, sometimes touched, sometimes tickled, never far from being naughty.*

That audience and its temper even Mr. Poel's reconstructive genius could not bring back. His audiences for "Everyman" were made up of hardened playgoers seeking new thrills, of devout persons casting back to pick up the authentic scent of medieval devout thought, of literary students improving an opportunity, of archaic sentimentalists projecting themselves into the dear, delightful Middle Ages, of theatrical craftsmen edified by the cunning simplicity of the business with the bells "off" and the electrifying patness of the successive exits of Everyman's friends. Most of the assemblage might be unaccepting and unawed, part of it might be fiercely repugnant against much that the play holds up to be admired, but all of it was breathlessly quiet, polite, respectful. We

* It is a common mistake to suppose that medieval audiences generally resembled the comparatively modern type of audience created for themselves by post-medieval religious dramas like that of Oberammergau.

may not believe, but we can sit still ; we are work ing out the monkey.

Besides, Mr. Poel knows how to absorb us in acting. "He reads the Bible," an amazed fellow-undergraduate once said of Arnold Toynbee, "as if he liked it—as if it were any other book." His acting and the acting that he taught made many people listen to that grave, drastic, fifteenth-century "play with a purpose" as if they liked it —as if it were some other play. There are many theatrical curios—academic revivals of Greek tragedies, for instance—which people contrive to enjoy as antiquaries, as friends of the cast, or as champions of culture. One might, as a gymnast, enjoy a play that one witnessed while hanging by the legs from a horizontal bar. But at "Everyman," acted this way, you could easily and strongly be stirred simply as a playgoer who wanted his money's worth in emotions. The acting had a maintained ecstasy of simple seriousness, every actor seemed to have the same grave, thrilled sense of the momentousness of what they were all handling : it was a kind of animated awe. They spoke like people who felt they were bringing tremendous news.

There was a rare and curious pleasure to be had from Marlowe's "Doctor Faustus," too, when Mr.

Poel gave it; but the pleasure was different. With all its magnificence "Doctor Faustus" is not a good play, at least not to us who live now. Compared with "Everyman," time has clawed it terribly in his clutch. The Morality may be two centuries older, and yet in a way it is the more modern of the two, modern in the vital sense in which "The Pilgrim's Progress" comes more excitingly close to a modern man than "Sir Charles Grandison," though Bunyan did write so long before Richardson. The older play, like the older story, goes straighter to feelings that do not change much from age to age, whereas, in spite of all its imperishable single lines, whole tracts or aspects of "Doctor Faustus" were of their own time solely, and now are dead as door-nails—the keen Renaissance relish, for example, for a certain kind of bookishness. And yet the show had its flavours. There was the pleasure of comparing the dramatic value of Marlowe's technics in the final scene, where Faustus has one hour to live, with the treatment of the same idea by a modern poet, in Mr. Yeats's "Hour-Glass," and by a modern play-manufacturer, M. Sardou, in his "Dante." There was the interest of seeing whether delivery on a stage could add anything to the worth of some of the most beautiful and famous verses ever written :

"Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
And burned the topmost towers of Ilium?"

"O, thou art fairer than the evening air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

There was, again, the pleasure of seeing what it was—as near as we can go—that gave people the pleasure of the theatre in Shakspere's youth. However much we may have lost of the power to take the play in, or to be taken in by it, in the same way as they, that way and the external means to it are piquant for us to see, just in proportion as they are alien and surprising. Here Mr. Poel spread a banquet of tit-bits of antiquarian research and acute conjecture. The stage set up was a copy of that of the Fortune Theatre built by Henslowe and Alleyn, outside Cripplegate, north of London, partly to be out of range of the City Corporation, partly to escape the competition of the Burbages, who had just plumped down the new and fine Globe theatre beside Henslowe and Alleyn's old house, the Rose, south of the river. Of course it would have been better still if we could have had the very stage—probably that of the Curtain Theatre—where "Doctor Faustus" was first acted, about 1588, for the Fortune was only built in 1600. No doubt it weighed with Mr. Poel that the Fortune is one of the most possible of Tudor theatres to repro-

duce rightly, because it is, we fancy, almost the only one for which we still have the text of the builder's contract, with specifications of the house's shape, dimensions, and arrangement, down to provison for tiling and guttering the roof of the stage so as not to let rain-water slop over on to the heads of the pit, who, of course, were exposed to the sky.

Some of us, perhaps, were a little troubled by Faustus's clothes. The part, as first played by Alleyn, is one of the few Elizabethan parts still to be known by sight. On the title-page of the 1616 edition of the play there is a woodcut of Alleyn's Faustus invoking a squat and stubby heraldic-looking Devil with a pug nose. The Faustus has a sort of ruff and what seems like an academic robe, very long and lined or bordered with white fur, with puffy, almost episcopal, sleeves that might be lawn. Then there is a chance note of Alleyn's costume in Samuel Rowlands's contemporary play, "The Knave of Cards":

> "The gull gets on a surplice
> With a cross upon his breast.
> Like Alleyn playing Faustus,
> In that manner was he dressed."

We looked to Mr. Poel for these garments, but did not exactly find them as one usually finds in

his doings all that research could furnish No doubt he had some other records in mind, or some very good reason for not going precisely by these.

A keen pleasure was this—that, at least while it lasted, the acting kept you in something of that state of grave and childlike absorption, and of freedom from our modern affliction of knowingness, which simple and enthusiastic souls can achieve in Florence while looking at Giotto's tower with an unclouded faith in Ruskin. The Pope at dinner was a masterpiece of well-conceived *naïveté;* the bell, book, and candle business was in delicious contrast with a recent commination service at Drury Lane, and the set, mortified countenance of the Duchess's one waiting-woman was worth whole retinues of the wheeling and countermarching stage Abigails of our years. The Méryon devil from Notre Dame, the quaintly trapesing and trolloping Seven Deadly Sins, the Michelangelically sinewy Lucifer were all delectable inventions in a most difficult kind, for the least slip in judgment was sure to raise laughter, and nobody laughed. Every one's mind for the moment was simplified, not, indeed, to the point of sharing Elizabethan joy in such a play, but to the point of a stirred interest in that joy and a hope of partial comprehension of it.

In "Measure for Measure," arranged for Miss Horniman's actors at Manchester, Mr. Poel was tackling greater stuff. No play has been more full of challenge to choice spirits. It stirred Pater to his best and Tennyson almost to his. Mariana and her moated grange have become part of the received landscape and figures of the English romantic imagination. The song sung to Mariana is a possible candidate for the place of finest lyric in the English language. Claudio's "thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice," speech might run Macbeth's "To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow" speech and Prospero's "insubstantial pageant faded" speech close for the place of finest speech in Shakspere, were such competitions decent. The grisly humour of Barnardine and Pompey jesting at the dawn with death is the prototype of who knows how many modern essays in the *macabre*, and none of them touches it. On the other hand the means taken to dish Angelo are pretty nasty; the liquidation of the whole imbroglio by the Duke is lethally slow and wordy; the Duke himself, for whom our respect is seemingly invited, is a sad skulker, who shirks the odium of his own decrees: the final pairing-off is a sorry business all round; and the steepness of some of the things we are asked to believe—Isabella's assent to the strategem, for instance—approaches the vertical.

In staging this jumble of beauties and uglinesses Mr. Poel's Elizabethanism went about as far as it could without rebuilding the Gaiety theatre. For the essence of the Elizabethan theatre was the fusion or interpenetration of stage and auditorium, and the essence of the modern theatre is their separation by the proscenium arch. The Elizabethan theatre was a deliberate reproduction of the accidental conditions of the previous performances of strolling players in inn-yards, like the well-known yard of the "Tabard." The players would rig up on trestles, against one wall of the quadrangle, a platform to play on. It did not run the whole length of the wall, but jutted out from its centre into the yard, and so the crowd in the yard, (the modern "pit") could look on from the sides as well as from in front; and the guests of the inn, standing on the continuous balconies of each floor (the originals of our "dress circle," "upper circle" and "gallery") could watch the play from at least three sides. The post-Restoration importation of the proscenium arch from the Continent, and afterwards the gradual drawing back of almost the whole stage to within it, were, together, a deep-going change. Instead of being looked at and heard from three sides at once, the actor is now only seen and heard from in front. Instead of being presented to the spectator like a statue,

"in the round," he is presented like a picture, in perspective and with a frame.

Mr. Poel did wonders, but he could not get rid of the proscenium arch. What he gave us was not an Elizabethan stage as it was to Elizabethan playgoers, but a picture of an Elizabethan stage seen through the frame of a modern proscenium. So we gained a good visual idea of a Shaksperean stage, but not the Elizabethan sensation of having an actor come forward to the edge of a platform in the midst of ourselves and deliver speeches from a position almost like that of a speaker from a pulpit or from a front bench in Parliament, with only the narrowest scope for theatrical illusion, with no incentive to naturalism, and with every motive for putting his strength into sheer energy and beauty of declamation, giving his performance the special qualities of fine recitation as distinct from those of realistic acting. But, without that, we got a good deal. We saw better than ever the needlessness, as well as the destructiveness, of the quite modern method of taking Shakspere's shortest scenes. They are usually scurried through by actors who maintain a precarious footing on a strip of boarding between the footlights in front and a bellying sail painted with landscape, which swells out at them from behind. In Mr. Poel's Elizabethan arrangement a roomy front portion of the stage is divisible

from the rest by a curtain which can be either passed through at its middle or walked round at its ends; the rear portion of the stage is in turn divisible into two or more planes of distance as it retreats into the "tiring house" at the very back. With this arrangement those short scenes and the long ones flow into one another without the slightest jolt or scrappiness. The use of the upper stage, too, was surprisingly effective and undisturbing; it made you see why Shakspere's stage directions so often bring in people "above," "on the walls," or otherwise aloft. But in fact the whole performance threw "side-lights on Shakspere" by the dozen, while just cause for thanksgiving—it never froze up the imagination of us ordinary, half-instructed persons, as reconstructive scholarship often does. As for scenery, one did not think about it, either in the way of missing it, or of being glad it was away. But if any people did imperatively need to be distracted from the play, they could look at the dresses, which were quaint and rich to admiration, and, we understood, prodigies of historical accuracy—only another Mr. Poel should venture to speak more dogmatically.

Last, and very large, there was the pleasure of the acting of Angelo by Mr. Poel himself, an actor who did not wait for Irish amateurs or Sicilian peasants to teach him to act as if he meant it.

Whatever he may be doing at the moment, the consuming energy with which he conceives a part communicates itself to the spectator; the character is so vehemently imagined by the artist that its expression seems almost independent of the ordinary symbolism of tones and looks. Or, rather, while he uses just the means which other actors use, they mean more *to him*: they stand for a more ardent realization, by him, of the idea, say, of an Angelo. When once the spectator is caught up into itself by this authentic heat of passionate imagination in an actor, the actor can then do nothing wrong; thenceforth his technics seem scarcely to matter: you feel as if you had got past all that, as you get past any little inexpressivenesses in a friend. So Mr. Poel's acting seizes you up and makes you more intimate with the character than its own speeches are.

The Wholesome Play

IN England nothing is so often said of plays as that they are wholesome—or, of course, unwholesome. You know the phrases—"a pure and wholesome drama": "wholesome, old-fashioned farce"; "a wholesome entertainment for old and young": and, in the music-hall advertisements, "two hours of refined and wholesome varieties." These are the innocent sheep. And then the goats—the "morbid and unwholesome problem play"; "the dark unwholesomeness" of Sudermann; the "brilliant but unwholesome" plays of Mr. Shaw. Or you hear how Sir Arthur Pinero was relatively wholesome till he wrote "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray," but never quite the same man since: or Mr. Maugham was most unwholesome in his youth, the wild days when he wrote "A Man of Honour," but is quite disinfected now, like Mr. Sutro, who also lay in quarantine once, for having truck with the unwholesome Maeterlinck. In France or Germany the first things asked, it would

seem, about a new play are, "Is it amusing?" "Is it interesting?" "Does it prove anything?" Among us what people ask is, rather, "Can it be seen without giving me any disease?"—as if plays were a species of drains that exist to convey, or abstain from conveying, diphtheria and typhoid. Where that is how playgoers look at a play, the meek kind of critic who tries to be all that his readers would have him becomes in due course a semi-official Inspector of Nuisances or a consulting sanitary engineer. He takes to the very language of these callings. You remember the things that were said by these experts when first Ibsen's plays were acted in England. The plays were called—no, certified; it was so positive—"bestial," "revolting," "abominable," "disgusting," "foul," "fetid," "putrid," "malodorous," "loathsome," "garbage," "offal," "carrion," "sewage," "an open drain," "unhealthy," "unwholesome." You see how strictly the vocabulary used is that of Medical Officers of Health.

Now, some of us have never been able—indeed, have not tried—to think of our playgoing as a branch of hygiene. Our friends, to judge by their talk, seem often to go to the play as they might go to brine-baths at Droitwich, or mud-baths at Leuk; we went, from the first, for the fun of the thing, and, to this day we never, when coming

away from a theatre, find ourselves feeling our pulses or taking our temperature. Perhaps these omissions may come from want of due seriousness. As some amends I once tried, in all humility, to see exactly what these sanitarians meant by "wholesome."

There is a kind of men before whom one feels that all one's poor knowledge is dross, compared with fine rubies like theirs, the men who will say at every third sentence they utter, "That's what Johnny Hare always tells me," or "Poor Toole used always to say to me—so and so." At the first sound of those formulas you feel that this man lives at the centre of things; and if you are prudent you pump him as long as he waits. Securing one of these pundits, and piping all hands to the pumps, I soon learnt—well, not what wholesomeness was in its essence, but where you could find it in sample and sometimes in bulk. "Why," he said, "there's all these things that Lewis Waller and Fred Terry do—'Monsieur Beaucaire,' and 'The Scarlet Pimpernel,' and 'Dorothy o' th' Hall,' and 'Sunday'; and of course all the things like 'The Idler,' and 'Mice and Men,' and 'The Only Way'; and, before that, 'Bootles' Baby' was charming; and, of still older things, there's always 'Still Waters Run Deep,' and there's all that Gilbert has written; again there's

this new piece 'A White Man,' and, if it comes to that, I'd like to know what's wrong," he asked, with an air that was almost a threat, "with 'The Belle of New York,' if you aren't a prig to begin with?"

The list made one ponder. Could wholesomeness mean moral, ethical wholesomeness? Did he, that is, mean to say that these plays and their kind were ennobling in this sense—that in them the doing of hard, right things, which we might have to do in our turns, instead of easy wrong things, was clothed with so much charm that doing those right things next day would perhaps come more easily? Consider the scene, we'll say, in "Mice and Men" where the soldier comes home to find out that desire for a former mistress fails him; in fact, he desires a woman who is younger; so he turns mighty virtuous all of a sudden and sends back his old love's letter of welcome unopened, taking so little thought for her that it is intercepted by her husband. And yet this sanctimonious cur is not so much as flicked by the dramatist with one little whip lash of irony. If anything, we are tipped the wink that what he did was quite the manly, knightly line for all gallant young soldiers in similar fixes. Not much ethical wholesomeness there. Or look at "A White Man." There you are invited to take it as quite

right and noble that an upright man should take on himself the sins of a wholesale thief, leaving the thief at large, among the world's spoons, in order that the thief's wife, whom the upright man worships, may not cease to live with her blackguard husband, and bear him, it may be, little blackguard sons. Imagine the state a man's mind must be in, or pretend to be in, to write morals like those. Still, that is but a trifle. For I went, in quest of the true wholesome brand, to "The Belle of New York." From a sympathetic presentation of a young hero drunk and lying on his stomach on the saddle of a bicycle and paddling in the air with his legs, the whole thing seemed to pass into an ecstatic fantasia on sex questions as these might be understood in fowl-runs or by cats in our backyards. The power of the play, as an emetic, was so great that I can only speak, as an eye-witness, of its first half. Certainly all my guide's wholesome plays were not daubed with quite that slime. But most of them held up to sympathy or admiration —that is the point—some mode of feeling that was poor and mean, if only "Monsieur Beaucaire" with its snobbish "sympathetic" heroine, or Sir William Gilbert's clever librettos with their rasping false notes of wit ("Silvered is the raven hair," etc.) at the expense of women who grow old and lose good looks and are not married. No perfect moral wholesomeness there, either.

Well, if not moral, was it intellectual? Did those plays, as people say, "widen our mental horizon"? Did they "make history live," or give us the very feel of a life lived to-day in some other part of the world? In the first that comes to mind, the wholesome "Dorothy o' th' Hall," the picture of Tudor aristocratic manners is such that you need only look at a few Tudor family portraits, at most read a few Tudor letters or journals, to know that historical drama like that is mere bunkum begotten of similar bunkum that flourished before it. Nor need you have been out in Western America—you need only glance through a little Bret Harte to be sure that a play such as "Sunday" has brought you no personal notes upon life out there, but merely a weak new decoction from old books, the slops you may make by boiling used tea-leaves again, the kind of bogus information Dr. Johnson had in mind when he distinguished from it a certain friend's excellent knowledge of life "seen freshly, not distilled through books." So in another of these "wholesome" plays, "The Scarlet Pimpernel," you find the results of no fiery first-hand imaginative vision of the French Revolution, but merely the shadow of a shadow of a shadow, just a modern reader's impression of Dickens's impression of Carlyle's impression of France under the Terror. And if there is one

thing certain about the hygiene of the mind, it is that you must keep its pipes from being choked with this mere fungoid literary stuff that grows on other literary stuff, the plays and novels and poems vamped up out of reminiscences of other poems and novels and plays.

You see, we are driven from pillar to post. No moral wholesomeness, it seems, to speak of. No mental wholesomeness at all. What other wholesomenesses are there? Well, there is certainly one. Before saying what, just look at two phrases you constantly hear from nearly every leal stickler for a "wholesome" drama. One is the phrase, "a hard day's work in the city." "The kind of play I want," they will say, "after a hard day's work in the city, is—so and so." And the other, akin to the first, is "the labours of the day." "When I go to a theatre," they say, "after the labours of the day, I really don't want—such and such a kind of play." In their scheme of life playgoing seems allotted to the place that a weak drop of whisky and water held in that of Sir Arthur Pinero's Dick Phenyl. "If you don't," Phenyl asked in surprise, "take weak drop whisky an' wa'er after the labours of the day, when *do* you take weak drop whisky an' wa'er?" If you don't go to theatres exhausted with the labours of the day, in what state *do* you go to theatres? They

start by implying the playgoer's normal condition to be one of mental prostration : plays are to rest on the working assumption that every brain which is to take them in will be just dropping with fatigue before it begins trying.

Often they will specify the nature of the labours with which they themselves are jaded by eight o'clock, and from the special origin of their private headaches they will draw general conclusions as to what no play should be. A man at the Bar, in large criminal practice, will say : " I see so much of wickedness and its resultant miseries in *my* day's work that I don't want to see them any more in the evening." Or a doctor will say : " Heaven knows I come across enough tragedies of heredity at *my* consulting-rooms without going into them over again at the theatre." Or a bankruptcy official will say : " After having to sift the consequences of human folly and waste and weakness during all *my* business hours I want some wholesome relief from these things at the play." All raise the same cry to be spared the artistic treatment of that special side of things of which each really does know something. They all, from their several stations in life, look to the drama as Mr. Shaw's Drinkwater looked to narrative romance, to " Sweeny Todd the Demon Barber," for that which should " tyke him aht of the sawdid reeyel-

lities of the Worterloo Rowd." And sometimes they will reinforce this ideal aspiration by reference to such primal truths of our common nature as that after dinner the digestive system calls for special service from the blood, and if the brain should then be doing hard work too, it also calls for blood, and then there may not be enough blood to go round.

Well, as judges of what may be best for their personal health, who shall rival them? Bacon says "a man's own observation, what he finds good of and what he finds hurt of, is the best physic." A cat, when bilious, goes out and eats grass, and, though you may prefer rhubarb pills, no doubt she knows what prescription is best for her own constitution. But, granted that critics like these are their own best protectors from dumps and gastritis, what is it likely that the drama of their choice will be—this emulgent dressing for sore brains, this nightly hydro for intellects run down by the day's main occupations? Count the conditions. Already you have it laid down: first, there must be no picture of tragic life with so much of the taint of truth or reality in it that it could afflict any weary Official Receiver or magistrate with reminiscences of what he knows about the actual connection between men's characters and the events of their lives; secondly, the success of some

fagged physician's after-dinner rest-cure must not be imperilled by what might recall, with any sting of veracity, that great source of tragedy which modern knowledge has more than restored to the place which primitive religion used to give to it—the fact that in body and soul parents and children live one continuous life, in which the winds sown by one generation are reaped as whirlwinds by another. But of course there is a thirdly, too, and a fourthly, and so on without end. Every man's trade makes some big human interest the field where he works: every one, "after the labours of the day," has the same right to warn the dramatist off that big interest. Are men of business, "after a hard day's work in the city," to be re-immersed in finance by such dramas as Björnson's "Bankruptcy"? Of course not. And then some poor tired, municipal Medical Officer, after *his* hard day's work in the city, shall he be exposed to further exhaustion by entering on points of professional duty and honour, as he himself knows them, in Ibsen's "Enemy of the People"? Of course not, either. And even the hard-driven housewife—after her labours of the day, shall she, if she goes to the play, be reminded of them by the rending sight of David Ballard's mother making both ends meet? Of course not, again. Perish all such insanitary thoughts! Each man and woman alike must be

taken out of the sordid realities of his or her own Waterloo Road. So the drama is driven off all the main roads of the life of our day; it is valued for what it excludes; and, to be called wholesome, must carefully disobey Hamlet and *not* "show . . . the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

If a dramatist fails to fall in with this fashion his failure is noted in terms which show at once the leading rules, the major premises, on which these sanitarian estimates of dramatic values are based. Some new play, we are told, is not really dramatic; in fact it is a "study in morbid psychology." Observe the nature of the argument that is here implied. (1) *Major premise.* No play can be a study in morbid psychology. (2) *Minor premise.* This new play is a study in morbid psychology. (3) *Conclusion.* Therefore this new play cannot be a play. Of course the very people who will affirm this major premise, and apply it in that way, will also call "Macbeth," or "Coriolanus," or any of Shakspere's numerous studies in morbid psychology not only a play but even a model play. But that only illustrates the fact that for many people the acceptance of Shakspere's greatness is mainly an act of mechanical assent to a valuation which they find nearly every one taking for granted as part of the natural order of

things, like the wisdom of Solomon or the strength of Mr. Sandow. Or again, a new play will be condemned as being not a work of art at all but rather "analytical" or "pathological," or as turning the theatre to a "dissecting room," as if normal dramatic art and the analysis of strange emotional states or moral types were two necessarily opposite and mutually exclusive things; and this objection, too, will be raised by people who at other times profess warm admiration for older plays in which the dissection of diseased souls is the main interest—"Hamlet," for instance, or "Richard II."—showing, again, how little of their own spontaneous personal judgment people often bring to the criticism of traditional masterpieces. Shakspere may do what he likes now, but woe unto the dramatist of to-day who takes seriously all that is said in Shakspere's praise and tries accordingly to do the kind of thing that Shakspere did in writing the ethical "problem plays" of "Measure for Measure" and "All's Well that Ends Well," or his anatomies of moral cranks or cripples, like "Troilus and Cressida" and—if he did write it—"Timon of Athens"; in fact, in writing all the many plays of his which seek (for it cannot be accident) to make your mind wrestle with tough thoughts in slippery places. For a new play that thus sets you grappling with thought,

where no thought had been, is sure to be scouted as "disagreeable," "unpleasant," above all "unwholesome."

Unwholesome, in one sense, it probably is. There are states of the body, or times of the day, in which even open-air exercise may not do good. A doctor will tell you we all ought to lie very flat on our backs for a time after dinner. "Just look," he will say, "at the beasts of the field. They lie down, every one of them, after full meals." No doubt the mind, too, has its own need to lie very flat on its back after all the square meal of reflection it gets in a "day's hard work in the city." It may well feel better next morning for passing a night at the play in being preserved from the use of its faculties. Wholesome, in that sense, the play that is null and void undoubtedly may be. But let us be clear about what that sense is; do not let us confuse what is wholesome for these minds, avowedly tired and dulled and dyspeptic, with what is wholesome for minds in health and condition. The strictest inaction may be just the thing for a delicate cow that has been driven far and has eaten much and now has a cud to chew. But the whole of the playgoing fauna does not consist of ruminants in frail health and much fatigued, and when one admits that a thing may be wholesome for some invalid, that is not saying what it

might be for the same person well, or for others who never were ill.

Here, however, one sees an objection. All this —some one may say—is merely telling what the "wholesome" play is not. But what *is* it? It is not, you say, a quickener of thought; it is not a thrower of genuine light upon life: it does not present to us, lifted into ideal or typical forms, our own possessing interests, our difficult points of business or professional conduct, nor our hesitations between many theories, all tenable, of what is best worth doing, or getting, in life—wealth, or distinction, or quiet, or sport, or the good of our kind, or a family's social promotion, or what not—the things that are real, that people think themselves to sleep upon, in bed at night: it does not, again, come near any searching, or even relevant comment on the mutual relations of men and women. Still it cannot be vacuum merely. Even the amplest system of holes must have something to keep them together. And so, apart from its exclusions and negations, what is there left that the wholesome play does not taboo? What does it present?

In trying to answer the question one casts an eye over the whole wide firmament of "wholesome" drama, seeking form or outline in the midst of space, and presently there do come

twinkling into sight, now in one place, now in another, as the stars do, the only slightly dissimilar stars, at dusk, a mighty host of variants of one central type of positive character. This type, in its general lines, is that of the man who is not, as we say, a bad chap after all; the man who, again, is more wide awake than he seems; the man who may not have much gift of the gab, but is sure to come well through a scrimmage; the man who does not wear his heart on his sleeve, preferring to wear there a heart much less good than his own, so that when he turns out an unparalleled brick the cynical observer of human nature is knocked all of a heap; the man who, morally, is a regular lion of generosity, usually crouched, it is true, but quite prepared to do terrific springs of self-devotion if the occasion for them be sufficiently fantastic—mentally, too, a perfect mortar or sunk mine of gumption, with a sluggish fuse to it, slow to take light, but going off at last in veritable prodigies of mother-wit and horse sense and other popular forms of practical wisdom; the man who "has his faults," but still—well, if he drinks he is "nobody's enemy but his own," and at those next-morning hours when a nature radically bad would be simply ringing for soda-water, he is delighted to be shot or guillotined for the advantage of comparative strangers; he may not keep appointments,

or pay his tailor, or do his work, and, of course, he is not a "plaster saint"; but then he "cannot bear to see a woman cry," and at any hour of the day or night he is game to adopt a baby, or soothe death-beds, or renounce, for reasons wildly insubstantial, the satisfaction of the cravings of his honest heart. You remember the heroes of "Bootles' Baby," of "Sunday," of "The Prince Chap," of all the other plays in which female infants are planted upon rugged bachelors, with vast emotional consequences farther on. You remember Mark Cross in "The Idler"—his phlegm, his ineffectiveness at common times, his easy ascent into saintliness; you remember the Scarlet Pimpernel, and the scapegoat in "The Only Way," and the scamp in "The Breed of the Treshams," and the lumpish man in "Still Waters Run Deep," and the swearing and back-slapping good-hearted miners and war-correspondents—characters that have their points of unlikeness one to another, no doubt, but still have all a solid greatest common measure of rough diamondism.

Of course there always were rough diamonds at the theatre. Shakspere's Fluellen was one; Ben Jonson's Squire Downright was another. But, till the rage for wholesomeness set in, the stage rough diamonds were but single spies. Only these last fifty years have the resources of the rough-diamond-

fields been really opened up; now our playwrights are floating a moral De Beers, without any of its great original's restrictions on output. They go up and down like Aladdin's mother when she went to court, shaking rough diamonds out of her dress whenever she moved. Why is it? Why all this over-production of one out of all the workable forms of amiable humanity? Well, you may notice that with those who hold by the wholesomist creed, it is one of the sacredest rules of all dramatic craftsmanship to "give the public what the public wants." You find the rule laid down in various sagacious aphorisms, such as the recent dictum of Mr. Hall Caine that the public is always right, a reflection drawn from him by repeated expressions of the public conviction that Mr. Hall Caine is always right, and amounting perhaps to a prose version of the well-known lyric refrain :—

> "So you are right, and I am right,
> And all is right as right can be."

And, again, you have it enshrined in trade maxims like the hackneyed one about "box-office criticism." No doubt, then, it is felt that the greater part of the great public longs to feast its eyes and ears illimitably upon this one ethical type. And as our most frequented dramatists, although they may not all be great hands at writing plays,

have usually a skill in marketing to which one can only take off one's hat, we may assume with confidence that when they feel this is a widely felt wish, so it is. The question then becomes, "Why does so large a public wish to revel in the contemplation of this special type? Is it, perhaps, because the type is rather like the vision that each of us, in his moments of maximum complacency, has of himself? To ourselves, you know, we are all still, strong men. None of us "has any nonsense about him" in the intimate intercourse that we have with our own natures after good dinners: then you see you were born, not perhaps for a life of humdrum duty, but to rise to tremendous emergencies; the scales fall from your eyes: your little external deficiencies fail to hide from you longer your heart of gold. You are thought stupid, perhaps—it is only that you cover discretion with a cloak of folly. You are rough? Yes, the goodwill of warm, rugged hearts like your own is too pure to practice mere forms. Are you not very nice in your talk?—Oh, it is just that your genuine Lancelots always do hate to put their white souls in the very shop window. If you do sometimes tipple a little, well, after all, what is a trifle like that compared with the way you would give up your life, as at present advised, on some distant romantic occasion? Once let the great love you bear yourself start off down

that greased slope of egoistic musing, and every bad thing that you know of yourself will become, in your sight, an actual mark of the saint and the hero that you would be if saintliness and heroism were only easier than all the routine work of being a tolerable ordinary person. Then go in that mood to a good "wholesome" play; the odds are, you will find you are seeing your own sterling self in a glass. "Still Waters Run Deep," "The Scarlet Pimpernel," "Sunday," "The Breed of the Treshams," "The Only Way"—they all show who shall inherit the earth or get clean into heaven—simply the you of your vision, the Bayard *manqué*, the Philip Sydney waiting to come off, the paragon that a man is to himself when he goes fast asleep while a lady is playing Beethoven, and dreams of the dragons he would slay for pure chivalry.

Of course this grand manly fellow is not the whole solid content of our wholesomer plays. They abound in a kind of half-made women, obtrusively weaker vessels, "hither all dewy from a convent fetched," and often as breathless and monosyllabic with aghast innocence as if they had run all the way—"sweet clinging natures," like a well-knitted sock, and about as fit as a sock for true marriage and comradeship; a type the elaboration of which is really so much sensual savagery, going back as it does towards the relation of some

Mogul or Khalifa to scared, half-grown slave-girls, if not to the relation of buck elk to the timorous doe of sentimental convention. And then there are the so-called "happy endings," the happiest of which, perhaps, is the ending that Sir Arthur Pinero, on coming to market, tacked on to his play of "The Profligate." You remember that, as he first finished the play, a youthful career of a kind that in real life does, as a matter of scientific fact, tend to early decay and some horrible death did end in such a death. Thus acted, it disturbed the wholesome party. So Sir Arthur Pinero re-wrote his last scene, for their peace, and the lot of his young debauchee was improved from a horrible death to life and happiness with a charming wife, a clean slate, and a brand new character. For this is the happy ending dearest to the sanitarian —that known causes should not have their known effects; above all, that in fifth acts any leopards which gain the playgoer's regard should be left rigged out in snowy, curly lambs-wool, and nice Ethiopians go off at the end as blonds with straight, tow-coloured hair. It all comforts the fine virile fellow we spoke of. It brings out the venial nature, almost the romantic value, of any wild oats he has sown; it pleasantly confirms his favourite domestic pose of the protecting male lion; or, if he be a bachelor, it authorizes his slightly Oriental

sympathy with Edgar Ravenswood's feeling that "the softness of a mind, amounting almost to feebleness, rendered" Lucy "even dearer to him, as a being who had voluntarily clung to him for protection and made him the arbiter of her fate for weal or woe." It helps to make him easy, too, about the nature of unselfishness, as something mostly to be practised on enormous and fantastic scales, in cases of a guaranteed remoteness.

Well, it may all, let us fully agree, be most wholesome, in some sense. It is true that Narcissus became at last seriously ill through doting so much on his own pretty face in the fountain. But we must not build too much on that. And one quite feels that after the play a man may sleep better who goes to bed thinking how truly a "good sort" he is, after all, than one whom some telling picture of a character stingingly kin to himself torments with the fancy that after all he *may* be a miserable sinner, not in the mild poetic sense in which he says he is, at church, but really and literally, in the same vivid and burning sense in which he is a ratepayer. It may quite well be better for digestion, especially after that hard day in the city, if the mind be gently laid on board a helmless barque and drifted down luxurious streams of vague, rather washy complacency, than if it be pulled up, one short hour after dinner, by the very

sight and sound of some grim, fierce-fanged truth that we knew to be true but were trying to keep safely out of our minds, like the irreparableness of all action and the extreme difficulty of squaring God without conduct. "Avoid," Bacon says in his essay on bodily health, "subtile and knottie Inquisitions." "To be cheerfully disposed," he adds, "at hours of recreation," is one of the ways to live long. The whole case, no doubt, for the wholesome play, from the point of view of the stomach and liver, is strong. Do not let us ever deny, then, that some useful work is done by the drama in sparing them any derangement. A gifted small girl, we are told, has explained that pins are a great means of saving life, "by"—she went on—"not swallowing them." Plays, too, may save health, by having no significance at all for us to swallow. Distinguished things have often served such modest offices capably. An epic poem will do to light your pipe with, or curl the hair, as well as any other piece of paper of the same size. And though we might lose some masterpieces if all the manuscripts of new epics were devoted to these purposes, still, let us be fair and admit that the curling of hair and the lighting of pipes are legitimate objects of human desire. And so, too, is the safety of our sanitarians' precious health; and if the theatre pursue it at the cost of only

fairly commensurate sacrifices, and with reasonable regard for other possible objects of human desire, well, it is a free country; no one need grumble. "Who sweeps a room as in Thy sight," a devout poet says, "makes it, and the action, clean;" and let us cordially allow that for dramatic art to aid the peristaltic action of the alimentary canals of the weary and heavily laden may also be a pious exercise.

Only, do not let us make this the whole and sole aim of the drama, as people would do who rush out to condemn as unwholesome all plays that impel you to think with a will about anything, or to ask, with a genuine wish to be answered, if all can be really so well as you thought with yourself and your world. For one thing, the practice of every great age of the theatre warns us against such exclusions. In the three greatest ages of them all -the Elizabethan prime in England, Molière's time in France, the Periclean period in Greece—you find no self-restriction of playwrights to the "wholesome" view or the peptonized theme. Among the three greatest Greek dramatists of whom we know, the highest achievement of the first, Æschylus, was, like Ibsen's "Ghosts," a study of a tragic aspect of heredity, a study so particularly disturbing to the susceptible playgoers that we hear rumours of

young persons dying of fright at the first performance. Of the second, Sophocles, one of the most beautiful and famous works was what would be now called a problem play, stubbornly argued out, on the question, akin to that which troubles our modern "passive resisters," to what point the private conscience of the individual may or should stand out against the collective conscience of the community as this embodies itself in laws and the decisions of lawful governments. Of the third, Euripides, one of the most perfect plays, the "Hippolytus," is in part what would be called by a modern wholesomist critic a disagreeable study in the morbid psychology of an emotional pervert, Phædra; while another, the "Medea," is, or contains, an elaborate discussion of—as we say now—the "rights of women," the mutual duties of husbands and wives, the comparatively low morality demanded of men by public opinion, the greater weight and tightness of the marriage bond for women, and the cheapness of current masculine sentiment about the facing of death in war as the heroic duty and privilege of man, whereas, as the heroine explains somewhat cuttingly, three battles are less dangerous than one confinement; in fact the play is everything that is termed un-play like and unwholesome when Miss Elizabeth Robins attempts it in London. In Molière's time the

ruling mandarins of wholesomism seem to have been the Paris clergy and perhaps the French Academy Academies are nearly always blankly wholesome; an empty room is easy to keep clean. While Molière, the first of French writers, lived, the Academy did not admit him; the Church procured the prohibition of his greatest play, "Tartuffe," as being "capable of producing very dangerous consequences"—in short, unwholesome; one of its pastors described him, at the time, as "a man, or rather a demon clothed in the flesh and dressed in the garb of a man," and "the most notorious blasphemer and libertine the world has seen;" and when he died they tried to deny him Christian burial. For the Elizabethan drama, do you think Marlowe's "Edward II.," were it new now, would be passed by that chief rabbi of the whole hierarchy of wholesomist critics, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays? And if you do not go to "King Lear" or "Antony and Cleopatra" with your ears well stuffed with cotton-wool, as one supposes that some of our invalid friends prudently do, well, you are in for a great piece of experience, but you are not in for a eupeptic evening's peace of mind.

Take it another way: think what the English novel, the chief glory of modern English letters, would be if it too had bound itself over, as much

of our drama has done, to keep up the quiet of torpid minds at their most torpid seasons. You remember how firmly "A Doll's House" was banned as subversive of this mental order. There the man whom Ibsen's irony handled was made, at first, much like ourselves, a quite decent, dutiful, family man. And then he collapsed, and oneself collapsed with him. One might have been feeling that, while not a saint, one was really a very respectable man of the world, in the right sense, with quite a fair portion, for this earth, of honesty, courage, unselfishness, comradeship. Then came the plaguy Ibsen, showing what tragic messes of baseness could be tumbled into, without much change of manner, by one not readily distinguishable from this object of esteem. To do that very thing, to fix and fascinate your mind, and then perturb it, is the characteristic aim of much of the greatest modern fiction. All who have read Mr. Meredith's studies of selfish sentimentalism or vulgarity of soul must have felt, more or less, as did Stevenson after reading "The Egoist," when he said, "Why, Meredith, you've drawn Sir Willoughby from *me*." So you rise from reading "Romola" with your sense of being not such a bad fellow after all converted into a suspicion that you may be little better than an undetected sneak. The novels of Mr. Hardy, of Zola, of Tolstoy, all

give an unreflecting optimism its notice to quit. That is not to say that to read them may not be a pleasure. Certainly it is not a pleasure of the same order as an opiate, or a fat-cushioned chair, or a liqueur. It is a pleasure not meant for the sickly; rather the pleasure of walking all day in north wind on the tops of rough hills where you win the joy of good, rude health through finding out how unfit you set out.

And it is not so with novels alone. All the big new things in all of the arts are upsetting at first to old habits of mind. The hullabaloo against Wagner was not an exception. Whistler, perhaps the first of modern painters, was quite sincerely conjectured by a British jury, amid public applause, to be little but a swindling mountebank. Swinburne and Rossetti were hooted at for years by many respectable persons as merely immoral and unwholesome. Of course a change comes in due time. Wagner is played in Paris now; they hang Whistler at Burlington House; we may have a Swinburne monument in the Abbey yet. All men, Burke says, are able to be just historically; the hard thing is, to be just, or to be candid, before the trial is past and the case is old history. Looking back now we should all be prepared to have stood up for Shakspere when Greene was abusing him as a plagiarist, or when

playgoers flocked away from his plays and his acting to see those youthful prodigies the Children of the Chapel, or when, as no doubt may have happened, sturdy, clean-minded critics at the Globe would ask for less of Richard Burbage in Othello or Macbeth and more of hearty, wholesome acrobatics and bear-baiting. Every one is advanced enough now to say what Philistines the Paris people were who thought the "Misanthrope" a repulsive psychological study when Molière first brought it out. No one but feels himself, now, the superior of Walpole in taste, Horace Walpole who, after the first night "She Stoops to Conquer" was played, pooh-poohed it as unwholesomely vulgar and low. But let us be more right than he, if we can, when we do really stand in his shoes and are judging some wholly new play in which some man whose work does not yet lead the market is stoutly refusing to write for the theatre just as a place meant to make it easy for dull or spent minds to bask themselves to coma in that hazy sunshine of complacency. That was what Goldsmith did when he broke the deep peace that had reigned between the Walpoles in the auditorium and the Kellys who then kept the stage in supplies of mushy sentimentalism. In some degree it was what Molière did when in the "Misanthrope" he called on indolent playgoers for a special effort

of intelligence, what Shakspere before him had done when he broke with his time's fixed ideas and staggered all restful old fogies, no doubt, with his unclassical irregularities and strangeness. They were all innovators, troublers of dozing minds; they would not be wholesome and let well alone. And though, to be Shakspere or Molière, it does not suffice to innovate and to be called unwholesome by the indolent, still, we may be pretty sure that the first-rate man, when he comes, will be a sad remover of old landmarks, and will, throughout his first struggle for acceptance, be often called unwholesome. The way to be ready to stand by him is not, of course, to force our own likings; not to try to prefer a new thing because it is new or because other people abuse it. The root of all right judgment in these things is obstinate fidelity to your own personal relish and disrelish—to give yourself to the enjoyment of a thing because you do enjoy it, and not because some one whom you think much of enjoys it, or some one else whom you despise does not enjoy it. What matters in criticism is not so much truth as reality, not so much your view's being sound as its being *yours*.

Of course, to have any critical self of one's own, one must keep off the backs of high horses of all kinds, the high horse of culture, the high horse of moralism, the high horses of critical authority and

tradition. A horse is a perilous thing for safety. Only don't think these beasts the worst perils. The greatest risk now is lest people, who do not know how good their own judgment is, should be brow-beaten out of their honest liking for some new, strange play because so few seem to agree with them ; because it is not the fashion ; because it is done, it may be, in a half-empty house, with all the massed makers and vendors of pot-boilers saying it is not the real thing, and all the newspapers that have the largest circulation in the solar system calling it unwholesome. There never was a time when the public opinion of the dull and vulgar well-to-do, who feel safest with bad work, and of the lower kind of dealers, who live by bad work, was so well organized and so vociferous. But if we go to the theatre with minds alive and well, and liking to be well, and caring not one straw for any of these principalities and powers, but simply trusting unashamedly to our own gusto to show what was worth an author's doing, then at least we shall have a chance of feeling, some time or other before we are dead, that at some real turning-point in the history of the English theatre we were on the side that was right then, and that afterwards won.

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